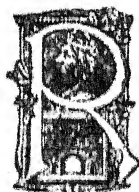


How to Read English Literature

Chaucer to Milton

BY
LAURIE MAGNUS, M.A.

Author of "Words and their Use," etc



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PREFACE

THESE chapters are intended as an introductory course to the study of English literature. They attempt, first, to interest the reader, as the primary condition of his future studies ; and, secondly, to direct his attention to the general unifying principles which govern the subject, and to provide the student with the means of 'orientation'—the power to find the points of the compass, whatever part of the field he may be surveying. Thus, they deal with impressions and with states of being, rather than with methods and *minutiae* of criticism.

An apology is due, perhaps, for this use of 'impressionism' in education, but the design is in conformity, I believe, with the recommendations of the advisers of the Board of Education as to the teaching of English literature. There is a general conviction that if the study is to take rank as a branch of humane discipline, supplying in part the vacant place which is left by the omission of Greek, it must be taught in such a manner as to cultivate the learner's taste and to stimulate his intelligence. The Board of Education, in their latest memoranda on the subject, addressed to the authorities in secondary-schools and training-colleges, have laid down the principle that the literature-lesson must be brought into

connexion with the history-teaching, and that literature, properly taught, must be shown to be intimately associated with national history in its political and social aspects. These considerations have been borne in mind in the preparation of the present book, in which an attempt is made to set the history of English letters in a definite relation to its environment, and to lead the reader to view the development of his nation's literature as an inseparable part of its general expansion and growth. In conclusion, I may add that, while I have kept in view the needs of schools and training-colleges, I trust that the general reader will find this book of some service as an introduction to the highest pleasure which humane studies can offer to him.

I have tried, by quotation and reference, to induce readers to consult longer and better works, such as Green's *History of the English People*, Traill's *Social England*, and Professor Courthope's *History of English Poetry*, and I am conscious of a further obligation to various books, too many for enumeration, which, like the present, are interposed between the student and English authors at first-hand. But, while gladly acknowledging the debt in this place and in my footnotes, I trust that there is novelty enough in my book to justify its aim of enabling students to consult with intelligence and appreciation the authors themselves, the makers of English literature.

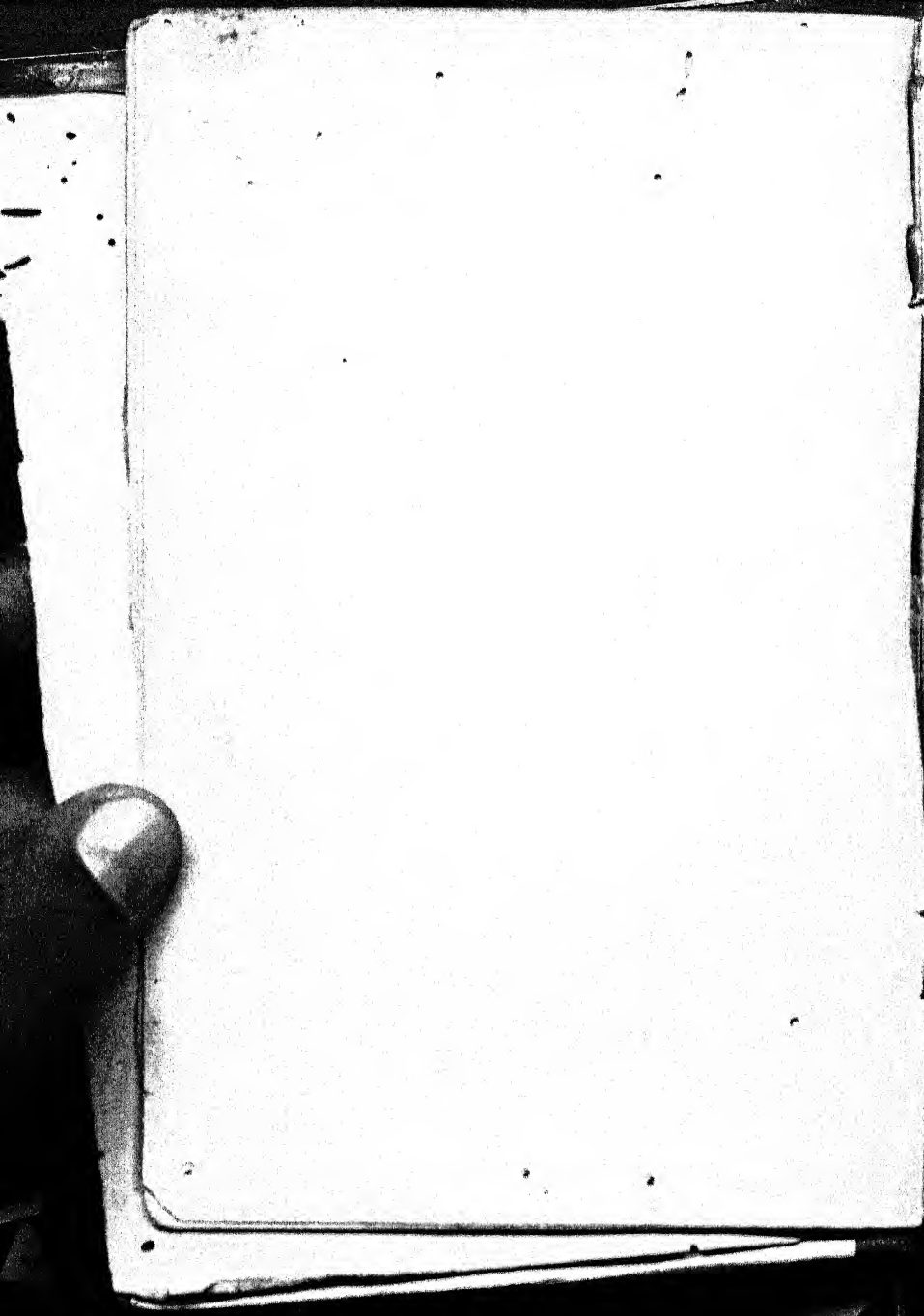
Part II, to be entitled 'Dryden to Tennyson,' will be published, I hope, by October next.

L. M.

LONDON, *January 11, 1906.*

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HOW TO READ ENGLISH LITERATURE

I. CHAUCER TO MILTON

CHAPTER I

ENGLAND AMONG THE NATIONS

'No one can long study history without being haunted by the idea of development, of progress'.

SIR JOHN SEELEY.

It is a favourite maxim of politics that 'trade follows the flag'. This means that the nation which wants to extend its area of commerce must send its flag in advance; that the soldiers and sailors, in other words, who are sent on punitive expeditions, or on exploits of avowed aggression, are the pioneers of commercial enterprise and of the peaceful relations of trade; and that no nation will succeed in taking a share in the world's trade which is not prepared to defend and maintain that share by a navy and army, directed intelligently from home.

The truth of this maxim can be tested by a glance at what may be called the history of history. The history of each nation is independent and self-contained, but it forms at the same time a chapter

in the comprehensive history of the world. It is at the points where each history touches the history of the world that we trace the course of civilization. The history of England has touched the history of the world at several points. It touched it in the reign of Elizabeth, when the westward march of Spain was arrested by the defeat of the Armada; and English sailors and adventurers planted Elizabeth's flag in the lands across the Atlantic. Civilization, in a famous phrase, became 'oceanic' in that epoch. It touched it again at Trafalgar and in the plains of Waterloo, when the long struggle for supremacy between England and France in the march of 'oceanic' civilization was determined in England's favour, and traders turned from the west to the east, seeking in India, China, and Japan the new markets which they wanted, and finding the new rivalries which were inevitable.

In a sense, the history of history is a record of 'decisive battles', to use another famous phrase, extending from Marathon to Mukden, and this view, which is roughly accurate, gives a clue to the statesmen's maxim about trade and the flag. It is only another way of stating an older maxim of historians that 'history follows the line of trade-routes'. Where the flag is planted, there commerce is established; where commerce flourishes, there history is made.

Another school of historians has a phrase, to which reference was made above. They speak of three stages of civilization—the *potamic* (from *πόταμος*, river), when Egyptian and Assyrian

merchantmen navigated the waters of the Nile ; the *thalassic*•(from *θάλασσα*, sea) when Carthage, Athens and Rome in ancient times, and the Adriatic Republics in modern history, bore the argosies of trade along the shores of the Mediterranean ; and the *oceanic*, when Spain and Portugal, Holland, the Hansa States, France, and England, and, more recently, America, Germany, and Japan made the oceans means of communication instead of impassable barriers.

This, again, is only roughly accurate as a summary of universal history ; but, in dealing with so large a theme, approximate accuracy is worth gaining for the sake of the generalizations which it permits. Civilization is seen in these aspects as a procession of national forces, awakened by the natural expansion of aptitudes and tastes, and enlarging their sphere as they advance ; the history of civilization is composed of the successive chapters in the history of each nation at its meridian.

Among such national forces, literature takes a chief place. A literary harvest followed Marathon ; there was a harvest of Elizabethan literature ; there was another English harvest after the victory of Waterloo. Those meridional chapters of national history, of which the history of civilization is composed, contain the history of literature. The stream of civilization carried literature and the fine arts with it. It flowed along the banks of the Nile, irrigating Egypt and Babylon and making the marvels of art and letters which we are spelling out to-day. It taught the Mediterranean peoples to build seafaring ships ;

it enriched half a dozen seaports with the fame of the Homeric legend, and crowned Greece with Sappho, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, Aristophanes, Thucydides, Demosthenes, and the rest of the Attics and the Alexandrians. It transferred its centre to Rome, bringing Terence, Lucretius, Virgil, Catullus, Horace, Cicero, Livy, Tacitus, in its train. It flooded the Adriatic seaboard, kindling the mediæval States to triumphs with the brush and pen, till its brightness culminated in Raphael and Dante. It visited Europe, west and north, causing Spain, Portugal, France, Holland, and England, to build ocean-worthy ships, and dowering the warders of the oceans with Rembrandt, Calderon, Columbus, Shakespeare, Spenser, Van Dyk, Milton, Hugo, Shelley, Wordsworth. Its force broke on Germany, touching her old city-states with the splendour of the vision, and Kant, Fichte, Schiller, Goethe, Lessing, arose. Some nations turned to painting for the expression of the civilizing force, others to philosophy, others to pure letters; but, wherever the trade-route was expanded, there the arts took their way, and literature, with which we are specially concerned, followed the flag as regularly and as eagerly as trade.

The general history of literature is a part of the history of civilization. The history of each nation's literature has its own beginning and development, with certain features common to all; it touches the general history of literature only at its meridional points. Thus, the history of English literature, like a great Englishman's biography, is interesting throughout its course to

the people among whom it grew up ; it is interesting to civilization only at its points of contact with literature in general history. Wellington's boyhood and early story, for example, his later years and his decline, are of keen interest to us who count him among our greatest men ; but it is only the chapters in his biography where his acts affected history that are important to the general historian. So, if we were following the history of Occidental literature, from the earliest home of the Muse on the banks of the Nile, through Athens and Rome, and 'downwards through that bright dream of commonwealths, each city a starlike seat of rival glory', to the modern Muse of the European nations and of the United States of America, English literature would detain us only with the few great names which have passed into universal history. The rise and development of that literature, and the backwaters through which it flowed, when the main stream of civilization was poured through other channels, would not form a part of our record. But at present we are taking the less ambitious range. We are inquiring how to read English literature as a self-contained whole, and as an item in our national possessions. To the student of universal history Shakespeare may mean a chapter in the development of the Western genius, as distinct from the genius of the East, in the course of the progress of drama from the religious tragedies of Æschylus, through the mystery-plays of the Middle Ages, to the romantic stage of Elizabeth. To the student of English literature, Shakespeare is all this, and more. He is the 'swan of Avon', nursed in Warwickshire meadows,

and self-taught in the green-rooms of London play-houses; a man of substance in the Midlands of Elizabeth's England, the friend or the forerunner of Marlowe, Beaumont, Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Greene; the type of the poetry which produced the Puritan reaction; the idol of the Nineteenth Century from Coleridge to *The Dictionary of National Biography*,—and it is with England's Shakespeare that the student of English literature is concerned.

At this point it may be asked, Why should English literature be read? and what is the object of the study? The answer to these questions is not necessarily forthcoming at the beginning of our inquiry. The importance of literature as a civilizing force is axiomatic; it is to be taken, as the phrase goes, 'for granted'. For one thing, it is impossible to conceive a state of civilized society without 'books' or their equivalent. There has never been such a society. Even before the invention of printing, written compositions were multiplied by the hands of slaves and scribes, or were 'published' by means of recitation. Printing ensured the permanence and increased the diffusion of books, but literature existed before printing. It came into existence in answer to an imperious human need; it rose, and flourished, and declined, in more than one nation of antiquity without the aid of the printing-press. The Pentateuch, the Psalms, the Prophets, the Apostles; Homer, Sophocles, Aristotle, Horace—these are only a few of the masterpieces of literature which were preserved for centuries before they were published, and which are yet of such great importance

to the religion, the philosophy, and the thought, of the present day. We think of literature to-day in inseparable connection with the printing-press ; but, in measuring the value of literature as a civilizing force, it should be remembered that many of the ' best books ' existed long before literature pressed the mechanical arts into the service of its needs. Printing was invented at a comparatively late period to satisfy a need of literature. The leaden types of the printing press are related to man's need of books as the metal coins of currency are to his need of barter. The spirit of trade existed before money, and the spirit of literature before printing ; as well try to discuss the *why* and *wherefore* of commerce as question the credentials of reading.

Literature, as a force in civilization, is too big to be neglected. We expect to find in English literature a reflection of the national life, rising or falling in value, as measured by the standard of human achievement, according as the fortunes of the nation are ascending or declining. What the Germans call the *Weltanschauung* of an author is nothing but his place in respect to the centre of civilization. The further he is removed from the centre, the less universal will be his outlook ; the less, that is to say, it will be in accord with the most excellent thought and taste of the times in which it is written. The Greeks spoke of ' Attics ' and ' barbarians ' ; the Attics were in the circumference of the circle of which Athens was the centre, and the barbarians were outside. The Romans spoke of the ' provincial ' note, and though many famous Latin writers came from

various states of the Republic or from outlying provinces of the Empire, they mostly drifted to the centre and acquired the true Roman voice. Both terms of criticism, 'barbarian' and 'provincial', have passed into modern use to express the defective *Weltanschauung* of an author who is distant from the intellectual centre of his age. Great literature, we may say in other words, is affected by centripetal gravity; it seeks the centre of civilization—temporary and shifting though it may be—in order that its outlook may be squarely and truly focussed. The distance of England from Rome at the time of Caesar's expedition was really immeasurable, though the mileage was the same as to-day; but the *Weltanschauung* of a Roman in the last days of the Republic, when Virgil was a boy at Mantua, and Cicero was declaiming in the Forum, differed from the *Weltanschauung* of the Angle 'stained with wood' as light from darkness. Till Caesar 'discovered' Britain, her inhabitants were utterly removed from the intellectual centre of their age.

This, broadly, is what is meant by saying that the value of a nation's literature, as measured by the standard of human progress, rises and falls according to the ascent or decline of the fortunes of the nation. English literature, therefore, will vary in merit according to the shifting place which England will be found to occupy towards the centre of enlightenment in the course of her history. There are times when English authors carried the torch of the world's literature high in the van of other nations; and other times when they dwindled in ineffectual channels, or even in backwaters of

thought: but throughout its history it reflects and interprets the aims and aspirations of a people whose part in the development of civilized life is still, we trust, not complete. It is the expression in writing of the acts of mouldered hands, and of the thoughts of brains that are dust. It is England's past made vivid in her present; not the whole of her past, for the vile and the worthless perish, but the parts selected for reflection and interpretation by the greatest minds in each age, applying the finest resources of their art, intellect, and genius, to the records and thoughts, the facts and fancies, most worthy to be preserved. A nation's literature is not a mere collection of old books. It has passed through a double process of selection; first, in the care bestowed by the writers of each age in selecting and composing their material, and, secondly, in the care of succeeding ages, exercised, unconsciously to some extent, in discerning the good from the bad. It is the sifted excellence of letters, the refined genius of the past, which has survived by its supreme expression the impartial criticism of time.

'In the highest civilization', wrote Emerson, 'the book is still the highest delight', and it is true that this study of how to read English literature will bring its own reward. Literature is in one aspect an immense civilizing force. Perpetuated first by oral repetition and by crude designs on stone, it presently used slave-labour to preserve and multiply its creations. 'Books', so called, might exist in only a single copy, and were liable to be utterly mislaid. More than one great

writer of antiquity is only known to us by name ; more than one fine library has been destroyed by fire, to the irreparable loss of many of the volumes which it contained. Out of the demand for books which men feel in civilized communities, the art of printing was invented. Printing is an engine of literature, a tremendous mechanical device invented to satisfy its need of a permanent form of perpetuation. The printing press may or may not have surpassed the expectations of its inventors. We may or may not have derived from it evil as well as good. Certainly, it has been the means of distributing masses of rubbish, and, equally certainly, it has not inspired greater writing than had existed before it, as in the Bible, for example. But it is still the powerful distributing agent which literature demanded ; it is still a unique monument to the victory of mind over matter—of the elements moulded to use by a force which cannot be resisted in the development of civilized society.

This view of the resistlessness of literature disguises, perhaps, its charm. Books are written to please, and, though an effort is required to mingle freely with great writers, their society is pleasant. The pleasantness of books is a pleasure of the higher senses, intellectual and spiritual. Let us see, in a single aspect, how such a height is attained. The material of books is words, as bricks are the material of houses. Words are the symbols employed to express through an intelligible medium the thoughts and images in the mind of the author. But the uses of words are diverse. The lowest and least effective use familiar to civil-

ized man is in his attempts to make himself understood in a foreign language which he knows imperfectly. His vocabulary is small, he ignores the elegances of diction, and he barely stutters out a sufficient quantity of uncoördinated words to express his simplest needs. The next lowest use of words—though at a far higher level than the last—is in a man's everyday speech in his own language. His vocabulary is still very small, for his range of subjects is limited to the ordinary routine of his life between getting up and going to bed. He reduces the combination of his words to the narrowest possible compass, preferring a kind of 'shorthand' speech, which quickly degenerates into slang—a convenient but slipshod mode of expression entirely unworthy of the dignity of the language of which he is a trustee. A like regard for economy of time, and a like disregard for the rights and niceties of words, have degraded the art of letter writing, in which language was formerly used with more care and correctness; but a higher grade is reached in set debate and serious conversation, where the argument requires that the words should be carefully chosen, placed correctly, and effectively displayed. Higher still is the use of words by speech-makers or orators, who have to consider the effect of their utterance on a large and critical audience, but even their words vanish into air or are preserved as a mere 'report', with its tendency to incompleteness and mistakes. The highest use of words is in their employment by a writer consciously casting his thoughts in a form as durable as marble. He selects his words with as loving a regard for truth as in the touch of the

sculptor's chisel. He combines and arranges them with the same trained sense of composition; his vocabulary is limited only by the height and depth of his imagination, which may range over every subject and stray into exquisite byways and figures to illustrate his theme. He is a wise and tender master of language, drawing out of each word the utmost power that is in it by his knowledge of its history and associations, and thus he produces the masterpiece of literature which is the 'highest delight' of civilization. But between the enjoyment of his words and the enjoyment of everyday talk, between this use of words and that, he has set the gulf of his labour—a gulf to be bridged by ours. The labours of great writers demand a similar effort on our part. If we are to enjoy the pleasure of that spiritual and intellectual society we must learn to speak their language, which is, after all, our own, only raised to its highest power. Without such an effort of preparation, the feast is spread in vain.

We have spoken of the majesty of literature, of its irresistible aspect as a force in civilized life. We have spoken, too, of its charm, of the rare gifts which went to make it, and of the ruthless competition which it had the virtue and excellence to survive. Of English literature now, as a separate whole among the literatures of the world, there is another aspect to consider. English literature has been lucky in its generation. Just as we may congratulate ourselves on being alive at the present point of time, when the powers of steam and electricity have been largely subdued by man, and when the arts of civilization have

been brought to a pitch of perfection which future ages may improve but to which they can hardly add; and, similarly, as we may congratulate ourselves on being citizens of a European State marching in the forefront of progress, more than a hundred years after the upheaval and re-adjustment of the balance of power in government, which limited so narrowly the interests and outlook, say, of a Frenchman at the end of the eighteenth century; in other words, as we are the heirs of certain acquired material advantages and solved political problems which enable us to take for granted what former ages had to contest, so English literature is fortunate in inheriting the literatures of the past. Modern life would be less capacious, less receptive to impressions, less broadly based on accepted points of departure, if we had still to free England from the fear of Napoleon, or still to deliver her from the bondage of Rome, or still to contend for the right of popular representation. And, likewise, modern literature would be less full of beauty and power, save for its good fortune in the time of its origin. This fell at a period which enabled it to assimilate the best of the spirit of older literatures. The wisdom of the Bible was poured into it, enriching it with a noble stream of imagery and thought; Greece and Rome brought their treasures, both of subject and of style, so that Bacon is inconceivable without Aristotle, Shakespeare without Ovid, Tennyson without Virgil; Venice and her sister-cities were flourishing before England, and minstrels and scholars, wandering through France, brought the tidings to our shores. It has been with these accretions that the stream of

- English literature has descended for six hundred years. It is to the select books surviving the perils of descent through six centuries that the present study is directed.

CHAPTER II

CHAUCER'S ENGLAND AND ENGLAND'S CHAUCER

'Rich, juicy, lively, fragrant, russet-skinned old Chaucer was an Easter Beurré; the buds of a new summer were swelling when he appeared'.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

WE are to go back six hundred years for the first records of English literature, and in accordance with the principles stated in the last chapter we must start by asking, What was happening in Europe during the fourteenth century?

It was a period of three Kings of England, Edward II (1307-27), who is chiefly remarkable for his weak reversal of the policy of his father; Edward III, whose reign of fifty years had a sombre, if glorious, hue; and Richard II (1377-99), the hero of a play by Shakespeare, in which his character is clearly delineated. But the names of kings furnish a very slight indication of the state of politics and society, even though the personal influence of the ruler was stronger in those times than in these. It will be sounder to give a list of names and events occurring during this period, and then to find, if possible, one or more guiding clues to the general features of the century.

Take Italy, for example. Two hotels, 'The

'Moon' and 'The White Lion', are said to have been established at Venice in 1319 and 1324 respectively. In Florence, in 1345, the great banking-houses of the Bardi, the Peruzzi, and others, suspended payment. Giotto, the painter, died at Florence in 1335; Dante, the Florentine poet, died in 1321, Petrarch in 1374, Boccaccio in 1375, and Froissart, the French historian, in 1410. From 1377-1381 there was a war between Venice and Genoa for the mastery of the Mediterranean trade. In 1395, a member of the powerful family of the Visconti was made Duke of Milan by the Emperor.

Turn now to the Hansa States and to Flanders. In 1300, there were seventy States included in the Hanseatic League, the great mediæval commercial federation of North-west Europe. In 1331, John Kemp was invited by Edward III to bring over a number of Flemish weavers to settle in England, in order to teach our wool exporters to manufacture cloth, and so to increase considerably the commercial value of the English export-trade. In 1351, the burgomasters of Ghent, Yprès, and Bruges, went on an embassy to Paris, and impressed their hosts by leaving at table the rich cloaks which they had used as pillows, with the remark, 'We Flemish are not wont to carry away our cushions after dinner'. Ghent and Bruges were fighting for trade advantages in 1379.

Next, take the annals of England, and read them in the light of the events happening at the same time in Europe. In 1290, the Jews were expelled by King Edward I, who used their money for his wars. Edward III, who invited the Flemish to settle in England in order to increase the value of

English wool, had borrowed so much money from the Florentines that he contributed to the Bardi bankruptcy. He started the Hundred Years' War with France, winning Crécy in 1346, and Poitiers in 1356. This century included the Black Death and the Insurrection of the Peasants. It is illumined by the names of John Wiclif (1320-1384), and of Geoffrey Chaucer (1335-1400).

There are obvious lines of communication between these three views of Europe during the fourteenth century. Edward I could devise no better means of getting money than by expelling the Jews, whose genius for finance was, therefore, withdrawn from England until the time of Cromwell. Edward III, more longsighted, went to Florence for his money, and to Flanders for his cloth-manufacturers. The Flemings, again, were involved in the battles of Crécy and Poitiers. It was less to become King of France than to prevent the French annexation of commercial centres in Flanders that Edward III went to war.

Our survey has omitted religion, unquestionably the greatest factor in mediæval politics. The conceptions of Church and State in this fourteenth century which we are considering, were symbolized by the two allied powers—an alliance of rivals—the Papacy and the Empire. The Bishop of Rome was the supreme head of the Church of Western Christendom. The Emperor of Rome was the supreme head of the State of Western Christendom. The Pope was the guardian of ecclesiastical education, the trustee of ecclesiastical law, the fountain of the logic of the Schoolmen, the commander of armies of preachers, a Jupiter

armed with thunderbolts of interdict and excommunication. The Emperor derived through Charlemagne the inheritance of the Cæsars; his secular power was co-extensive with the boundaries of the Roman Empire; he was the military overlord of all the constituent kings, a feudal chief over vassals, exacting a suzerain's rights. Such, at least, was the theory of the constitution in the century under review. The theory was upheld at such pageants as the Diet of Coblenz, held in 1338, where King Edward III 'prayed' the Emperor for permission to go to war with France, and the Emperor, holding aloft the emblem of the Empire of the world, and surrounded by armed representatives of the so-called vassal-states, solemnly invested King Edward with the territories of Philip of France, under the title of Imperial Vicar. When this solemn show of catholicism and feudalism had been played to its empty end, the Hundred Years' War broke out; the Emperor's absolutism was called in question, and, in the event, the imperial symbols were shattered with the substance. The brilliant pageant at Coblenz concealed the weakness of the system, which was intended for the display of the qualities of a Hildebrand or a Charlemagne. It had created chivalry, with its moral and religious obligations; it had united the feudal units in the successive crusades, but it was no longer suited, even at the beginning of the fourteenth century, to the existing conditions of social and civil life. The overlords of Church and State, in their pretentious and exalted deliberations, wholly ignored the facts and actualities of the times. Tradition was strong enough to take Edward to Coblenz, but

it did not enter into the cognizance of the Diet to discuss the advantages of Flemish trade or the stability of Florentine bankers. Yet these were the ruling factors in the policy of Edward III, whatever part he felt bound to assume as a vassal king under the Emperor at the feudal Diet of Coblenz. The Catholic Church of Rome, and the Catholic representative of the head of the ancient Roman Empire, descended through Constantine from the Cæsars, were no longer the end-all and be-all of religious speculation and civic ambition. Schism in the Papacy and dissensions in the Empire had wrought their weakening effects; individual cities and states had developed characters of their own, corresponding to their local needs of commercial enterprise and municipal growth. The theory of the universal Roman Empire, which had dominated Europe, round which the composite system of kings and dukes and counts had been compelled to group itself, and which was still reflected by a kind of universalism in its language and education, was giving way to the rivalries of faction, to the growth of a spirit of nationalism, and to the inevitable principles of liberty and law. The Emperor might create a Visconti Duke of Milan; he could not prevent the gradual enrichment of the burghers, and the repetition in every Italian city of wars of trade and politics, in one of which Dante himself suffered more than one sentence of exile. The Emperor might out-cry the Pope in his claim to the empire of the world; he could not rule the human passion displayed by the Flemish burgomasters when they thought that their commercial importance

had been less than fully recognized by the French. Fighting was everywhere—fights between families, fights between parties, fights between cities, fights between States ; Dante was exiled by one party in Florence, Chaucer was starved by one party in London ; Venice, just building her first hotels, had to fight with Genoa for the Mediterranean trade ; Ghent and Bruges, united against France, fought each other as rivals ; England, just starting her fairs as centres of trade and education, and just inviting foreigners to introduce the skill of their labourers, fought France for the open market in Flanders, though her population was decimated by the Black Death, and convulsed by the social problems that ensued. And over them all was the pomp of the brilliant decay of the twin powers of Catholic Feudalism.

At this point we may review the few ascertained facts in Chaucer's biography. Robert le Chaucer, his grandfather, had been a collector in the Port of London of the new customs upon wine granted by the merchants of Aquitaine. John Chaucer, the poet's father, was a vintner, with house property in Thames Street, London, who acted at one time as deputy to the King's Butler in the Port of Southampton. Geoffrey, the poet, was a yeoman of the King's Chamber, and subsequently became an 'esquire'. Between 1369 and 1373 he was employed on the King's service abroad, taking part in the war in France, where he was a prisoner for two months, and visiting Genoa to treat with the merchant-princes of that city as to the choice of a port in England for the advancement of Genoese trade. The visit extended to Florence,

and may have included Padua. On Chaucer's return to England, he received several Royal bounties, and was appointed Controller of the Customs and Subsidy of Wools, Skins, and Tanned Hides in the Port of London. In 1377 he was in Flanders, employed on a secret mission, and also in France with a peace embassy. In 1378, he went to Lombardy to treat with Visconti of Milan regarding the expedition of war, and stayed in Italy some months. On his final return, his fortunes seem to have risen and fallen with those of the House of Lancaster; he became a Knight of the Shire of the county of Kent; he held and lost various offices and pensions, and he died in 1400, when he was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Let us add to this record one or two significant facts from English history at that date. In 1362, Parliament was opened for the first time by a speech in the English language. Six years previously Sir John Mandeville—or the translator of the French book of travels published under his name, for the origin of this work, which achieved considerable popularity, is still a moot question—had dedicated his *Travels* to the King. In 1392-93 (though the date is not certain) John Gower, Chaucer's lifelong friend, 'moral Gower' of his friend's dedication*, issued the last of his three poems. The first, *Speculum Meditantis*, of which nothing remains, had been written in Anglo-Norman French; the second, *Vox Clamantis* (about 1382) was written in Latin; the third, *Confessio Amantis*, was written in

* Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* :

O moral Gower! this book I directe
To thee. . . .

English. It has a running Latin commentary, and its thirty thousand lines contain a large admixture of French, but Gower's conversion to English towards the end of his life, taken in connection with the patriotic aims of the reign of Edward III, is a further indication of the growth of national sentiment during the fourteenth century, of which Chaucer's poetry is the most valuable outcome and proof. Not the least contribution to this result was the appearance before the end of the century of the English version of the Bible by John Wiclif and his disciples. The reformer and the poet moved on parallel lines towards the same national end—the end which in these days might be described by the epithet 'imperialism'. They worked for the liberties of England, for her place in the light of the sun, and their chief weapon was the independent English language, newly arisen from the confusion of dialects, and newly-protected by the Court.

Such then was the political environment, and such the public career of Chaucer, the first English poet. Though not a great man in politics, he moved among great events. He fought in France; he held posts in the Civil Service; he visited Italy and Flanders on missions of State; he may have met and conversed with Petrarch and Boccaccio, and he travelled in Italy in the shadow of Dante's death. However small the part he played, at least he had access to the heart of the civilization of his times. England's quarrels and treaties, her interests in Italy and Flanders, the King's loans from Florentine banks, his invitations to Flemish weavers; England's earliest diplomatic entry into

the central region of international trade and politics—a wide curiosity in these matters and a definite mission in respect to them were a part of Chaucer's equipment when he went abroad on State business. These gave him a settled purpose; they sharpened and focussed at the same time his keen powers of observation. Amid all the distractions of the route, when a day's journey might transport him from one seat of warfare to another, he was safe from the impulse of the adventurer or free-lance. He knew what to look for, and where to find it—a faculty of travel valuable even in these days of guide-books and Cook's tours, but particularly valuable under the conditions of life six centuries ago which imagination can hardly reconstruct. And to the possibilities contained in the time and manner of his travels he added the accidents of his temperament. He is described as a man of a 'wise and tender' aspect, full of kindness and good-fellowship; a man of the world, as the world was understood at that day; a student, a cautious man, a good friend, healthy-minded, evenly balanced between his appreciation of books and nature, and therefore not too dependent on the company of men; not easily elated, accordingly, by prosperity nor depressed by adverse circumstances, always preserving in his human relations—perhaps even in that of husband, though the facts are not clear—something of the detachment of the looker-on, the quality which makes a good priest, sympathetic, even jovial, but hardly passionate or impulsive; a man, like Horace, capable of satire, because not caring over much for any one, and yet taught—by experience and acquire-

ments beyond the average of his age—the magnanimous piety which scorns to be petty. Surely, if ever external circumstances and individual proclivity—environment and temperament—conspire to produce a poet, they conspired in the instance of Geoffrey Chaucer.

What kind of poet did they produce? A partial answer may be given in the eloquent eulogy of James Russell Lowell, the great American critic:

'It is good', he writes, 'to retreat now and then beyond earshot of the introspective confidences of modern literature, and to lose ourselves in the gracious worldliness of Chaucer. Here was a healthy and hearty man, so genuine that he need not ask whether he was genuine or no, so sincere as quite to forget his own sincerity, so truly pious that he could be happy in the best world that God chose to make, so humane that he loved even the foibles of his kind. Here was a truly epic poet, without knowing it, who did not waste time in considering whether his age were good or bad, but quietly taking it for granted as the best that ever was or could be for *him*, has left us such a picture of contemporary life as no man ever painted. . . . He could look to God without abjectness, and on man without contempt. The pupil of manifold experience—scholar, soldier, ambassador, who had known poverty as a housemate and been the companion of princes—his was one of those happy temperaments that could equally enjoy both halves of culture, the world of books and the world of men. . . . The portrait of Chaucer, which we owe to the loving regret of his disciple Occleve, confirms the judgment of him which we make from his works. It is, I think, more engaging than that of any other poet. The downcast eyes, half sly, half meditative, the sensuous mouth, the broad brow, drooping with weight of thought, and yet with an inexpugnable youth shining out of it as from the morning forehead of a boy, are all noticeable, and not less so their harmony of placid tenderness. We are struck, too, with the smoothness of the face as of one who thought easily, whose phrase flowed naturally, and who had never puckered his brow over an unmanageable verse'.—*My Study Windows*. (Routledge, New Universal Library, pp. 214-5.)

Looking backwards and forwards, we may discover at this point what kind of literature Chaucer would *not* write—a very valuable discovery in forming an estimate of a writer. He escaped the tediousness of his predecessors. By the grace of his acquaintance with Boccaccio, by his intimacy with the methods of Petrarch and with the style of Dante, above all, by his knowledge of a world of activities and interests outside of the cell or the study, he acquired that sense of proportion and order which is of the essence of art, and which is lacking so conspicuously in the interminable versification of John Gower and his foreign models.

Of study took he mostē care and heed;
Not one word spake he morē than was need:
All that he spake it was of high prudencē,
And short and quick, and full of great sentencē.

Thus Chaucer, of his Clerk of Oxford, and the description applies to himself, the first English artist in verse. He escaped, too, the thrall of foreign masters. It is true, he began as a translator, working at French and Latin texts, but this was merely the apprenticeship of his muse, among others, to Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, the two compilers during more than fifty years of the thousands of couplets known as the *Roman de la Rose*, a discipline as inevitable in those days as Tennyson, let us say, in these. He translated, and adapted, and paraphrased, and assimilated, throughout the work of his life; but he was primarily an inventive English poet. He escaped, again, the artificiality of his predecessors. Allegory and fable, romance and chivalry,

Courts of Love, codes of casuistry, metaphysical and moral speculation, personification, alliteration—all the conventions and technical apparatus bequeathed to poetry by the trouvères are to be found or traced in Chaucer. But he broke away from them in his most characteristic passages. With the opening words of his *Canterbury Tales*

Whan that Aprillé with his shoures sooté
The droghte of Marche hath percéd to the rooté

he ventured to observe for himself. He began that work of the consecration of the commonplace which is the true function of poets. Chaucer could afford to be unconventional. He apologizes in one place for not preserving the rules of social precedence in introducing his characters

Also I pray yow to forgeve it me
Al hav I nat set folk in hir degre
Here in this tale as that they sholdé stondé.

In another place he expounds the principle that truth in narration must be upheld

Al speke he never so rudely and so large . . .
Crist spake himself ful brode in holy writ,
And wel ye wote no vilanie is it.

In other places he does not apologize; he has the courage of his own opinions. We find in him a frank repudiation of the monastic tradition of education on the one hand, discredited by more expansive ideas, and of the oral minstrelsy on the other hand, the attraction of which was ceasing to act on the more cultivated taste of the public of his day. To the same courageous directness of

constructive criticism we owe Chaucer's inimitably fresh descriptive faculty. He saw life with morning eyes. He discovered nature to man; or, rather, he looked out on life with a kind of new sight, refusing to accept the current conventions and inherited moulds of literature. The 'literary sense', to employ a modern phrase, which sees common things through painted glass spectacles, was rejected by this poet: its rejection meant the beginning of modern natural poetry.

The *Canterbury Tales*—the best and most original of Chaucer's writings—consist of a series of stories, grave and gay, related in succession (or, rather, in a kind of rough alternation of subject) by the participators in a pilgrimage from London to the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury. The cavalcade is composed of persons drawn from all ranks of life, as the following list of tales will show:

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Knight's Tale | Clerk's Tale | Sir Thopas's Tale (by Chaucer) |
| Miller's Tale | Merchant's Tale | Melibee's Tale (by Chaucer) |
| Reeve's Tale | Squire's Tale | Monk's Tale |
| Cook's Tale | Franklin's Tale | Nun's Priest's Tale |
| Man-of-Law's Tale | Doctor's Tale | Second Nun's Tale |
| Wife of Bath's Tale | Pardoner's Tale | Canon's Yeoman's Tale |
| Friar's Tale | Shipman's Tale | Manciple's Tale |
| Sompnour's Tale | Prioress's Tale | Parson's Tale |

The stories are collected from all the sources open to so learned a student of mediæval romance, and to an acquaintance as keen as Chaucer's with the writings of Boccaccio and his contemporaries. They are governed by his own indomitable *bon-*

homie, the bright genius of a man, who was courtier, traveller, diplomatist, business man, in one, and on them is the dew of England's morning in the radiance of the nation's awakening.

The jolly host displays the strength and courage of hospitality, undeterred in the exercise of its duties either by the awe of rank or by the fear of 'rough customers'. Thus, he is equal to the task of stopping a tedious recital, and he permits a degree of fustian too robust in places for modern taste. In all, he preserves the democratic ideal of free speech and fair play.

The *Prologue* opens, conventionally, with the praise of spring, but the conventionality is on the surface only. Chaucer strikes, characteristically, a deeper and more universal note than the slavish imitators of the stock phrases of mediæval poetasters. His lines are as follows :

Whan that Aprillé with his shoures soote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote,
And bathéd every veyne in swich licoúr,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour ;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweté breeth
Inspiréd hath in every holte and heeth
The tendré croppés, and the yongé sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfé cours y-ronne,
And smalé fowelés maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open eye,—
So priketh hem Nature in hir coráges,—
Thanne longen folk to gon on pilgrimáges,
And palmeres for to seeken straungé strondes,
To ferné halwes, kouthe in sondry londes ;
And specially, from every shirés ende
Of Engelond, to Caunturbury they wende,
The holy blisful martir for to seeke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

Every one must feel the spontaneity of this

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description. It may be paralleled in Catullus, the Roman lyrist,

iam ver egelidos refert tepores, . . .
iam mens praetrepidans avet vagari,
iam laeti studio pedes vigescunt.

Carmen xlvii

which might be almost literally rendered

Now April bringeth his sweet showers again, . . .
Now Nature pricketh the hot hearts of men,
And moveth them to go on pilgrimages.

It may be paralleled again, five centuries later, in Tennyson's *Locksley Hall*, from the lines beginning 'In the Spring',—so true, so common, so universal, is this note of stirring and burgeoning in the springtide, which Chaucer struck for the first time in the dawn of our national poetry. Again and again in the *Tales* of this unrivalled story-teller, whose ready wit and moral gravity, whose sly, shrewd tongue, and keen, kind eye form so priceless a possession, we meet with descriptive passages giving evidence of the same desire on the narrator's part to think and see for himself, without reference to preconceived standards of poetic propriety. The vividness and realism of the poems are remarkable, as every reader will discover for himself. The pilgrims are dust long since, but they live in present actuality. We know them, and know through them our England of the fourteenth century.

In a later chapter of this work, we shall come to a period of English literature which is sometimes described as that of the 'Romantic Revival'.

Wordsworth, one of its leaders, has expressed the principle which guided him in respect to the language which he employed. 'A language', he writes, 'arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and upon their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites'. And he adds a note to the effect: 'It is worth while here to observe that the affecting parts of Chaucer are almost always expressed in language pure and universally intelligible even to this day'. Wordsworth was criticizing the poets of a much later time when he discussed the superiority of natural language to an artificial poetic diction; but similar considerations may be applied to the writers of the fourteenth century. Professor Courthope has two passages which are helpful at this point. In his *History of English Poetry*, he says:

In his (Chaucer's) picture of the Canterbury pilgrimage, with the frankness of criticism prevailing among all its members, with the strength of its public opinion, with its power of regulating its own affairs, we find, what as yet had nowhere else appeared in modern European literature, the image of an organized nation . . . Concurrently with the conscious growth of civil liberty, there came almost inevitably a change in the fundamental conceptions of art. Poetry was removed from the regions of Metaphysics, Allegory, and Theology . . . and began to be re-animated by the old classical principle of the direct imitation of nature.—Vol. I, p. 300

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And, again, in his *Life in Poetry, Law in Taste*, Professor Courthope writes :

The son of a London vintner, his early observation and criticism of the humours of middle-class life inspired him with the idea of that characteristically English imitation of nature, afterwards carried to such splendid heights by Shakespeare. . . . In the ideal atmosphere of *The Canterbury Tales* the petty distinctions between Saxon and Norman seem to disappear, since both races are measured by the universal standard of humanity and commonsense. . . . Chaucer was the head of the innovating poets, who wrote in rhyme after the French manner. His system proved victorious ; and he has therefore justly been acclaimed by Wyatt, Surrey, Spenser, Dryden and Wordsworth, as the founder of the art of English poetry.
—Pages 203-4-5.

Let us sum up here the effect of Chaucer's innovations, and of his work as an English inventive poet :

i. As a layman—the first lay writer in England—he was released from the fetters of an ecclesiastical purpose. His outlook on life was healthy and direct. He was not bound by the discipline of the Church, nor forced to follow the monastic tradition, either in his opinions, or his style. He was competent to assimilate the 'free thought' of his age in the countries of the intellectual renaissance.

ii. As a man of the world—soldier, official, diplomatist, traveller—he was released from narrow insularity. The patriotic sentiment of national writers of to-day had not then been developed ; Chaucer does not mention the victories of Crecy and Poitiers, nor the death of the Black Prince ; but he is keenly affected by the forward movement of the nation in political and social life, in which he

had borne an honourable, if not a distinguished, part.

iii. As a writer in the English language, he was released from the conventions of diction and style which choked up the approaches to Nature in the French and Latin poetry of the day. There is a certain naïveté, or gaiety, in Chaucer's return to Nature; every detail seems to be seen for the first time; nothing is too mean for observation. But the symmetry between the parts and the whole is so instinct with art, that the ornaments agree with the main scheme of construction, and are not jejune. And his freshness is an added charm in these days when even nature is becoming a kind of 'fashionable' cult, with a poetic 'jargon' of its own.

These propositions claim for Chaucer the positive title of a critic of life—a man who saw the life of his times with interpreting vision, and rendered it according to his genius, unhampered by any rule imposed by artificial standards, other than the laws of the metre—rhymed decasyllabic couplets—which flowed easily from his pen. Like all men who look on the tragi-comedy of life with such penetrating and interpretative power, Chaucer was a creative humorist, in this sense the direct forerunner of Shakespeare, Fielding, Dickens. He had his limitations, of course. His language was to some extent unformed: it had to supplement its Saxon shortcomings by borrowing from French. His survey was to some extent restricted: the democratic principle was very young in his times, and he felt bound to apologize in places for seeing poetry in common life and common things. The

marvel is that his muse should be so modern and so free, while the forces of Catholicism and Feudalism still loomed so largely in men's eyes, and that he should have written his *Canterbury Tales* in the England of his day. For, as John Richard Green reminds us in his *History of the English People*,

It is the first time that we are brought face to face not with characters or allegories or reminiscences of the past, but with living and breathing men, men distinct in temper and sentiment as in face or costume or mode of speech; and with this distinctness of each maintained through the story by a thousand shades of expression and action. . . . It is life in its largeness, its variety, its complexity, which surrounds us in *The Canterbury Tales* . . . It is this largeness of heart, this wide tolerance, which makes him to reflect man for us as none but Shakespeare has ever reflected him, and to do this with a pathos, a shrewd sense, and timely humour, a freshness and joyousness of feeling, that even Shakespeare has not surpassed.

—Vol. I. (1881), pp. 508-9.

CHAPTER III

A 'BARREN AGE AND ITS TERMINATION

'There is no part of history so generally useful as that which relates to the progress of the human mind, the gradual improvement of reason, the successive advances of science, the vicissitudes of learning and ignorance, which are the light and darkness of human beings, and the revolutions of the intellectual world'.

DR. JOHNSON.

WHEN Edward III died in 1377 he left, like greater kings before and since, several descendants but no successor. This fact is important in its bearings on the development of England as a civilized and civilizing power, or, rather, on the arrest of that development during a period of about a century from the date when Chaucer died, leaving some of his tales unfinished*, owing to the scantiness of his leisure, but leaving in the body of his poetry not merely a landmark of English literature but a monument to the national energy encouraged by Edward III.

Edward, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of that king, died in the year before his father. Hume calls him 'the heroic Edward', a title which better suits his noble qualities and virtues than

* Him that left half-told.

The story of Cambuscan bold . . .

Milton: *Il Penseroso*, referring to the incomplete 'Squire's Tale'.

the soubriquet of 'the Black Prince', derived from the colour of his armour. He had married 'the Fair Maid of Kent', Joan, daughter of the Earl of Kent, his uncle, who was beheaded at the beginning of the reign. Richard, the son of this marriage, survived his father and grandfather, and was eleven years of age when he succeeded to King Edward's throne.

The King's second son was Lionel, Duke of Clarence, who left an only daughter, the wife of Mortimer, Earl of March.

His third son was John, Duke of Lancaster, called John of Gaunt from his birthplace; the fourth was Edmund, Earl of Cambridge, and afterwards Duke of York; the fifth was Thomas, Earl of Buckingham, and afterwards Duke of Gloucester, and the King's sons-in-law included the King of Castile, the Duke of Brittany, and the Earls of Bedford and of Pembroke.

Thus, the boy king, Richard II, started his reign with the natural disadvantage of a group of Royal uncles, one of whom, John of Gaunt, had tasted the sweets of power when his father was old and infirm. To this natural disadvantage some acquired disadvantages were added. Edward's wars had depleted the national coffers, nor did they tend in effect to true national aggrandizement. The Scottish campaign, inherited from Edward I, was wasteful and unjust, and the war against France had been deflected from its original purpose—the open market in Flanders—into a lingering parade of aggressive and vainglorious ambition. The urgent need of money was supplied by repeated impositions, each more burdensome and arbitrary

than the last, and the occasional reciprocal grant of concessions to the people by the Crown led to irregular and violent proceedings which the democratic instinct was too young and Parliament too weak to control. Taxes were frequently levied without the consent of Parliament, and almost the last message of Edward III to his people reiterated the authority of this prerogative where the 'defence of the realm' was concerned. Commerce and shipping were alike affected by the wars, the former owing to taxation and the latter to the seizure of ships. The Black Death reduced the price of labour in all trades except soldiering, and thus intensified the social unrest inevitable to the break-up of feudalism.

If 'the Heroic Edward' had lived to continue his father's policy, with the strength of an assured position, beyond the reach of envy or intrigue, and with the affection and confidence of his subjects, England's development on the lines laid down by Edward III in the early years of his reign might have made steady progress. But the change from a firm and absolute monarch, with fifty years' experience behind him, with the record of Crecy and Poitiers, and with the reflected promise of his heir-apparent, to a weak lad with jealous uncles was too sudden and severe for the country to recover quickly in such critical times. It was not till seventy years after King Edward's death that English navigation reached the Baltic; it was not till half a century later still that it reached the Mediterranean. It was not till the reign of Henry VII that England began to conclude commercial treaties with foreign powers—with Denmark in 1490, and

with Flanders in 1496,—showing that English merchants were at last sailing their own vessels instead of depending on the visits of the Venetian, Hanseatic, and other fleets. And it was not till about this date, or even a few years later, that the ideas sown by Chaucer began to bear fruit on English soil, and that names equal to his were added to the roll of English literature.

Yet such would have been the natural consequences of the policy of Edward III. Opinions may differ as to the character and capacity of that prince, but no one disputes that, partly by foresight, partly, perhaps, by the force of circumstances set in motion by himself, and aided, doubtless, by the accident of a continuous reign, Edward III brought his country perceptibly nearer to the central movements of his age. For a century or more after his death, England 'counted' much less in the development of European history.

What happened during that century? We need not rehearse the events in detail, but it is well to know what kinds of experience went to form the sentiments and intellect of Englishmen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In a play by Shakespeare, entitled *Richard II*, there occurs the following passage from John of Gaunt's speech on his deathbed :

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise ;
This fortress built by nature for herself,
Against infection, and the hand of war ;
This happy breed of men, this little world ;
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,

Or as a moat defensive to a house,
 Against the envy of less happier lands;
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
 This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
 Fear'd by their breed, and famous by their birth,
 Renowned by their deeds as far from home
 (For Christian service and true chivalry)
 As is the sepulchre, in stubborn Jewry,
 Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son;
 This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
 Dear for her reputation through the world,
 Is now leas'd out, (I die pronouncing it,) like
 Like to a tenement, or pelting farm:
 England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
 Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
 Of wat'ry Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
 With inky blots, and rotten parchment bonds:
 That England that was wont to conquer others,
 Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.

Nearly everything in this passage is historically inaccurate. The Duke of Lancaster died in February, 1399, but the 'gaunt' old man and the death-bed scene have no foundation in fact. Nor is it in accordance with the Duke's conduct and character during the preceding twenty years that he should have pronounced so eloquent a panegyric on the country which he virtually governed during his nephew's minority; and the fact that his son, Henry of Lancaster, in the year of his father's death, ascended (as King Henry IV, in September, 1399) the throne from which Richard had been deposed is significant of the temper of Lancastrian ambitions. Still, the sentiments 'read into' history by a dramatic imagination like Shakespeare's may be truer, in a sense, than history itself, and the passage just quoted is valuable both for what it contains and for what it omits. It is plain that a mere score of years had sufficed to

degrade the inheritance of Edward III, and to undo the work of his life. Gaunt says nothing of England as a 'Great Power' or a 'World Power', in the modern political sense. To him the sea—even in those days of 'thalassic' civilization—is still a 'defensive moat' and a barrier to exclude, not a means of communication with the countries and peoples beyond. In the days when England should have been developing her foreign policy and relationships with a view to the extension of her commercial importance, Gaunt is still a 'little Englander', to use another modern phrase, and the England of his ideal is a self-inclosed, self-contained island. Such an 'insularized' view was not in accordance with the schemes of Edward III. Again, Gaunt says nothing of his own attempt to claim the crown of Castile, and of his use of the English forces, urgently required in Flanders, to prosecute his campaign in Spain. The reduction of Ghent by the French in 1386—the one remaining market for English commerce—might thus possibly have been averted. Gaunt, indeed, says nothing of the causes, to which he contributed so largely, of England's decline; for the dramatist's purpose he is represented as 'a prophet new inspired', and in that capacity he acquires an access of patriotic zeal, though he misses the width and wisdom which Edward III had encouraged. If those sentiments had animated the Lancastrian following during King Richard's early years, this 'conquest of England by itself' might never have occurred. For this speech is neither prophecy nor history: it is the chapter which the Duke of Lancaster did not write.

As such, it is valuable in judging the actual history which he made. Richard II, as we have seen, ascended his grandfather's throne as a boy of eleven in 1377. In 1485, Henry VII was crowned King of England. He was the eighth English King who occupied the throne during these 108 years. The list of Kings is as follows :

1377-99, Richard II
1399-1413, Henry IV
1413-1422, Henry V
1422-1461, Henry VI
1461-1483, Edward IV
1483, Edward V
1483-1485, Richard III
1485 (-1509), Henry VII,

the first of the line of Tudor monarchs who reigned till the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603.

Eight kings in 108 years—an average of thirteen and a half years each—afford, without further particulars, a strong presumption of violence. But now take the evidence of their fate: Richard II was deposed by his cousin Henry Bolingbroke, son of John, Duke of Lancaster, who reigned precisely the average number of years, but whose kingdom was held at the sword's point during a series of rebellions. His son, Henry V, tried to distract his troubles at home by reviving the English claim to the French crown. He died in the midst of his bloodshed, leaving an infant son, who became Henry VI. The Joan of Arc episode ensued; England was driven out of France; the troubles at home, which had never really ceased, broke out afresh under Jack Cade; the

King went mad; civil war—the War of the Roses—began; the Duke of York, the Regent, was killed at the Battle of Wakefield; his son defeated the Royalists, and was crowned as Edward IV. York succeeded Lancaster, as Lancaster had succeeded Plantagenet, but there was not yet peace. Henry VI was restored; the War of the Roses was resumed in the fields of Barnet and Tewkesbury; Henry was murdered in the Tower, and Edward V succeeded Edward IV. Then another Royal uncle intervened, as in the instance of Richard II. The boy-King and his brother were murdered by their uncle Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who ascended as Richard III. His reign was brief and bloody. Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, who descended through his mother from John of Gaunt, twice made an attempt for the crown. He was successful at the field of Bosworth, where King Richard was killed, and his marriage—as Henry VII—with the Princess Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV, united the ‘Roses’ of Lancaster and York, and ended the civil war. His reign was turbulent and oppressive, but his house was at least secure. The century of change was over, in which, as Shakespeare said through the mouth of Richard II, one might

... tell sad stories of the death of kings :—
How some have been deposed ; some slain in war ;
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed ;
Some poison'd by their wives ; some sleeping kill'd ;
All murder'd : for within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king,
Keeps Death his court ; and there the antick sits,
Scoffing his state, and grinning at his pomp ;
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks ;

Infusing him with self and vain conceit,—
As if this flesh, which walls about our life,
Were brass immovable; and humour'd thus,
Comes at the last, and with a little pin
Bores through his castle-wall, and—farewell, king!

Meanwhile, foreign countries had not been idle. In this century of confusion in England, block-books had been produced in Holland; Gutenberg set up his printing press in Strasburg, and two of his workmen went to Italy, first to a monastery in the Apennines, and afterwards to Rome, where they issued editions from manuscripts of Cicero and other Latin authors to the great glory of Italian letters. Venice, Milan, Naples, and other cities followed suit, and, though Caxton had a press in Westminster as early as 1476, he missed the influence of the wealthy and cultured patrons of literature, such as Cosmo de' Medici and his grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent, of Florence, who encouraged the revival of the classics and the development of native genius*. It has been calculated that the invention of printing and the use of linen-paper instead of parchment diminished the price of books towards the close of the fifteenth century by four-fifths of their former cost.

Thus, when the weary years of transition were ended, the Englishman of the Tudor kings woke up to a new world. He had peace abroad, and comparative prosperity at home. The social unrest, aggravated by dynastic and party fighting,

* 'In a literary history it should be observed that the Caxton publications are more adapted to the general than the learned reader, and indicate, upon the whole, but a low state of knowledge in England'. Hallam, *Literature of Europe*, I., iii. 51.

was beginning to settle down. The power of the nobles was giving way to the nobler and stronger power of the merchants and middle classes. The 'vulgar tongue' began to have a meaning, for the English language, of which Caxton complained that it varied so much, was becoming wide-spread and uniform. And he woke up to a 'new world' in a more literal sense. Copernicus had revealed to him the marvels of the universe; Columbus had crossed the unplumbed ocean, thus changing the stage of civilization from sea-power to ocean-power; Vasco de Gama had doubled the Cape of Good Hope, and discovered the sea-route to India; Sebastian Cabot had threaded the icebergs of Labrador. The thrill and romance of contact with new lands, new peoples, a 'new world', since the pilgrims of Chaucer had fared from London to Canterbury, were awaiting the Englishman under the second Henry Tudor. And he woke up to an old world renewed. The horizon of his intellect was widened by an inheritance as grand as the discoveries in the physical and stellar universe. Learning, as Roscoe quaintly writes in his *Life of Lorenzo de' Medici*, 'was emerging from its state of reptile torpor'. Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles, Virgil, Cicero, Sallust, all the writers of Greece or Rome, emerged from their dark night into a brightness unknown even to their contemporaries. The light not of one country but of many, the labours not of Pagans but of Christians, an audience not of hearers but of scholars, greeted the 'restored' Greeks and Romans, when the Jews, who had passed through the turmoil of the Middle Ages without abating an iota of their love of learning for its

own sake, relinquished their long and unrewarded trust, and gave back philosophy to Christendom, and when manuscripts from the East and exiles from Greece were accounted not the least of the treasures of the merchant fleets of Italian cities. Who shall write of the later fifteenth century, of the young wonder of that age, of its solemn, mystic, spiritual arts of symbolism and imagination, without thrilling to the contagion of its opportunities and aims; its humanism, its freeing of the spirit, its obscure reconciliation of the old myths and the new faith, its activity, its receptivity, its curiosity? Victor Hugo rendered our debt to the printing-press when he wrote: 'In the action of Christ bringing forth the loaves, there is Gutenberg bringing forth books. One sower heralds the other . . . Gutenberg in the fifteenth century emerges from the awful obscurity, bringing out from the darkness that ransomed captive—the human mind'*. Keats caught the spirit of the age in his sonnet of intellectual discovery:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
 When a new planet swims into his ken;
 Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
 He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
 Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
 Silent upon a peak in Darien†.

Such was Copernicus, such Balboa, in this age. Volumes of books will not bring us nearer to their spirit.

* *William Shakespeare*. Routledge (New Univ. Library, pp. 70, 130).

† *On first looking into Chapman's 'Homer'*; 'Cortez' should, historically, have been Vasco Nunez Balboa (1475-1517).

One or two facts and dates may be added to the foregoing remarks.

First: The disuse of the French language in England, which began, as we saw, about the time of Chaucer, may be measured by two scenes in Shakespeare's play, *The Life of King Henry V.* In Act IV, Scene iv, Pistol is unable to understand more than a word here and there of a French soldier at Agincourt. In Act V, Scene ii, when the battle is won, and King Henry is wooing Princess Katharine of France, his Majesty is represented as unable to conduct his love-making in French, the only language which the Princess understands. Shakespeare has doubtless exaggerated the mutual ignorance of the two sets of countrymen, but such cross-purposes would have been impossible at the beginning of the Hundred Years' War.

Secondly: The Joan of Arc episode mentioned incidentally above occurred early in the fifteenth century, when the Maid of Orleans was inspired to lead her sovereign, Charles VII, to his coronation at Rheims, and, after valiantly performing the high acts to which she was moved, fell a piteous victim to English hate and superstition, and was burned alive in June, 1431. Her story added to the list of heroic lives, and, as such, to the material of literature. The late Professor James Darmesteter, of Paris, in a charming essay on 'Joan of Arc in England'*, has traced the history of the Maid in English letters from Caxton and Holinshed, through Shakespeare (*Henry VI*, Part I), Michael Drayton, Thomas Butler, Hume, and Wesley to Southey, John Stirling, and—in art—William

* *English Studies.* T. Fisher Unwin, 1896, pp. 3-71.

Etty, Rossetti, and W. Calderon. To these may be added the names of Schiller in Germany, and of Voltaire in France—so great was the literary value of the life which flashed through the second decade of the fifteenth century with meteoric brilliance.

Thirdly : We note the multiplication of libraries and of seats of learning, such as the Universities of Paris, Leipzig, and Wittenberg, in the period under review. Universities flourish where trade flourishes, and some mediæval universities—Cambridge is a notable example—grew out of the lectures incidental to the 'fairs' held in the neighbourhood. Thus, their foundations point to the civic and mercantile activity of the several centres.

Fourthly : The following list supplies very roughly some material for an estimate of the progress of arts, letters, and discovery in Europe towards the end of the fifteenth century ;

| Name. | Description. | Born. | Died. |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------|----------------------|
| Gutenberg | German, printer | 1400 | 1468 |
| Paston | English, <i>The Paston Letters</i> . . | — | <i>circ.</i> 1450 |
| Columbus | Italian, navigator | 1445 | 1506 |
| Vasco da Gama | Portuguese, navigator | — | <i>circ.</i> 1525 |
| Lorenzo de' Medici 'The Magnificent' . . | Florentine ruler and patron . . | 1448 | 1492 |
| Amerigo Vespucci . . | Spanish, navigator | 1451 | 1512 |
| Leonardo da Vinci . . | Italian, painter | 1452 | 1519 |
| Savonarola | Italian, reformer | 1452 | 1498 |
| Erasmus | Dutch, churchman and scholar . | 1466 | 1536 |
| Colet | English, scholar | 1467 | 1519 |
| Copernicus | German, astronomer | 1473 | 1543 |
| Sebastian Cabot . . . | Venetian, navigator | 1474 | 1537 |
| Michael Angelo . . . | Italian, painter | 1475 | 1564 |
| Sir Thomas More . . . | English, author of <i>Utopia</i> . . | 1478 | 1535 |
| Martin Luther | German, reformer | 1483 | 1546 |
| Raphael | Italian, painter | 1483 | 1520 |
| Ignatius Loyola . . . | Spanish, Jesuit | 1491 | 1556 |
| Margaret, Queen of Navarre | French, author of <i>The Heptameron</i> | 1492 | 1549 |
| Coreggio | Italian, painter | 1494 | 1534 |
| François Rabelais . . | French, wit | 1495 | 1553 |
| Holbein | German, painter | 1497 | 1543 |

Before examining more closely the English contribution to this record, reference must be made to an allied movement of the age. Side by side with the 'revival of learning' during the fifteenth century went the emancipation of thought from ecclesiastical control. Ranke, the great German historian, opens his *History of the Reformation in Germany* with the words: 'for purposes of discussion or of instruction, it may be possible to sever ecclesiastical from political history; in actual life, they are indissolubly connected, or rather fused into one indissoluble whole'. Certainly this is true of the history of Europe (and, therefore, of England), at least till the date of the Diet of Worms, early in 1521, which is, in Carlyle's words, 'the greatest scene in modern European history; the point, indeed, from which the whole subsequent history of civilization takes its rise'*. The revolt against the Papacy did not begin at this time. Already, back in the fourteenth century, where we left John Wiclif and his disciples translating the Bible into English, and thus adding immeasurably to the moral and literary equipment of their countrymen, this revolt had begun. Wiclif's corps of 'mendicant friars', religiously-minded priests who covered the country, not with tracts—for printing was still to be invented,—but with practical help in physical and spiritual affairs, had become, under the name of 'The Lollards', so powerful an agent of reform in the reign of Henry IV that measures were taken to suppress them. The seed was sown, not in England only, but

* *Lectures on Heroes*, IV. Carlyle selects Martin Luther for his type of 'The Hero as Priest'.

even more fruitfully abroad. John Huss continued in Bohemia the work of rousing men's intelligence to a sense of the burden of the Roman Church, which had built up into a system of tyrannous ecclesiastical control, ubiquitous and rigid to its minutest detail, the simple doctrine and guide to conduct of Christ and the Apostles. Huss was shamefully betrayed, when, in 1414, relying on the 'safe-conduct' of the Emperor, he came to the Council of Constance. 'Huss was burnt, but not the truth with him: I will go, though as many devils take aim at me as there are tiles on the roofs of the houses',—thus cried Martin Luther, 107 years later, when he went to the Diet of Worms. But the cause which Luther represented, and for which Huss had died, was too strong at that date for a single act of treachery to repel it. Luther was safe at Worms, because the spirit of the Reformation had spread its beneficent and liberating influence through the length and breadth of the traditional Empire. Moreover, the endless difference between the secular and spiritual sovereigns of mediæval Christendom was then particularly critical. Charles V, the Emperor, like his grandfather Maximilian, whom he succeeded in 1517, had not been crowned by the Pope, and was not anxious to offend him, and Leo X, the Pope, though one of the most powerful of his line, was using his power with an insolent disregard of the currents of popular opinion. In the tales of *The Heptameron*, ascribed to Queen Margaret of Navarre, the race of friars is treated with scathing contempt. They are boldly portrayed as money-seeking, pleasure-seeking, esurient, lascivious; they prey

on the stupidity of their poorer neighbours, and their rich clients in turn use them as the tools for their intrigues. They are flogged in the kitchens of the rich, they empty the larders of the poor. Yet this is the race to whom the 'Vicar of God', in his capacity as the spiritual Sovereign of Europe—of Europe wakening to the beauty of life, cultivating the arts and letters of Hellenism and Latinity, reading the Bible in the vernacular, extending the boundaries of commerce, opening the gates of the world, discovering the secrets of the universe—saw fit in the blindness of his might to confide the power of absolution by money. Columbus was serious when he said, 'He who possesses money has the power of transporting souls into Paradise', for while the lesser 'indulgences', granted for payments in cash, without questions asked, provided certain favours of the Church much sought after by the pious or superstitious, the 'plenary indulgence', which required contrition as well as cash, could release the soul from Purgatory. As Ranke writes in his *History of the Reformation*:

The doctrine that the power of the Pope extended to that intermediate state between heaven and earth called Purgatory was the growth of modern times. The Pope appears in the character of the great dispenser of all punishment and all mercy. And this most poetical sublime idea he now dragged in the dust for a miserable sum of money, which he applied to the political or domestic wants of the moment. Mountebank itinerant commissioners . . . outstripped their powers with blasphemous eloquence. They thought themselves armed against every attack, so long as they could menace their opponents with the tremendous punishments of the Church. But a man was now found who dared to confront them.—Book II, Chapter I.

The man was Luther, the 'Hero-Priest', leader

of the Reformation in Germany. He was a type of the reformer who is really a conservative, or, rather, a restorer and reactionary, for his enlightened aim was to destroy the hierarchy of Rome in order to rescue and reconstruct the Kingdom of Christ on earth. The account of his campaign for the doctrine of salvation by faith must be sought elsewhere. Here we have only to note the progress of the Reformation as a part of the atmosphere or environment in which the Tudor Kings of England were privileged to inaugurate their dynasty. It affords yet another aspect of the many-sided movement towards freedom.

For the weary tract of time had been traversed. The rival kings and dynasties were dead, and had buried their dead; Royal uncles and nephews, fathers and sons together. Henry VII sat on the throne of Edward III, with the added memories and experience of more than a hundred years. His England, like Edward's, sought a place in the sun, but the sun of the Tudor shone on a different world from that of the sun of the Plantagenet. Commerce had spread her sails, blown by the winds of adventure, and Spain, Portugal, Italy were closely followed by England to the strange lands across the ocean—followed, and ultimately surpassed. Learning had lit her torch at the fading fires of the East, and the flying terrors of darkness and superstition shrivelled, and slowly disappeared. There were still problems to solve, still lands to conquer, still lessons to learn; but when Henry VII died in 1509, England had emerged from her 'dark ages', and was entering the noonday of the sun.

CHAPTER IV

ENGLAND'S MERIDIAN

'The grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery; its gift lies in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them; of dealing divinely with these ideas, presenting them in the most effective and attractive combinations,—making beautiful works with them, in short'.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

HENRY VII died in 1509. To him succeeded his second son, King Henry VIII, who reigned till 1547. His great Chancellor was Wolsey. He built the 'Henry Grace de Dieu', the biggest ship then afloat. He pulled down the smaller monasteries, and printed the Bible in English. He met Francis of France on the Field of the Cloth of Gold. He exchanged Wolsey for Cranmer, and Catherine of Aragon for Anne Boleyn. He assumed the title of 'Supreme Head of the Church', and beheaded Sir Thomas More for opposing the Act of Supremacy. He helped to found Christ Church, Oxford; he corrected abuses at the universities, and he appropriated revenues wherever he could find them. He beheaded two wives, and lived to marry a sixth, and he beheaded, burnt, or hanged, many unfortunate subjects, both dis-

tinguished and obscure. He patronized Holbein, who painted his portrait several times, and he was on the whole a man built on big lines—masterful, burly, bluff, a popular monarch in times of national awakening and self-assertiveness, a better statesman than diplomatist, more regal than kingly, an autocrat fortunate in his country's constitution.

Henry left three children, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth, each of whom reigned in turn, Edward for six years, Mary for five, and Elizabeth for five-and-forty. Thus, of the five Tudor monarchs who sat on the English throne between 1485 and 1603, Elizabeth—the youngest—had the longest reign in which to display most effectively the full-blooded strength, the purpose, and passion, and charm, which characterized the members of her family in different combinations and in various degrees. Unlike her many-wived father, Elizabeth was a virgin Queen, and something virginal and isolated in the England of her day, making a stately progress through the full summer of her prosperity, seemed even to contemporaries to identify queen and country. Later ages have seized on their implicit association, and the Tudor period or century—or at least the ninety-four years of Henry VIII and his children—has passed into popular acceptance as 'The Elizabethan Age', 'the spacious times of great Elizabeth', in Tennyson's phrase*, which hit off with his usual happy selection of epithets the extension of the boundaries of space and the greatness of the age

* *A Dream of Fair Women.*

crowned by the life and work of Sir Francis Drake, Sir Humphry Gilbert, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, Edmund Spenser, Richard Hooker, Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare. For in England, as in Athens of old, and as in the Italian Republics during three hundred years, the sea-captains and the men of letters flourished together.

It is interesting to note the direct and immediate connection between these movements. We can trace it in the *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More, a romance written originally in Latin, and printed abroad in 1516, during More's mission in Flanders concerning a treaty of alliance. A few years previously had appeared the book of voyages by Amerigo Vespucci, who gave his name to America, and the two works were intimately connected :

He told us how that, after the departing of Vespucci, he and his fellows that tarried behind in Guliche began by little and little, through fair and gentle speech, to win the love and favour of the people of that country, inso-much that within short space they did dwell among them, not only harmless, but also trading with them very familiarly. He told us also that they were in high reputation and favour with a certain great man (whose name and country is now quite out of my remembrance) which of his mere liberality did bear the costs and charges of him and his five companions. And besides that gave them a trusty guide to conduct them in their journey (which by water was in boats, and by land in wagons) and to bring them to other Princes with very friendly commendations. Thus after many days' journeys, he said they found towns, and cities, and weal-publics, full of people, governed by good and wholesome laws.

Thus More introduces us to his visionary country of Utopia, building up on the discoveries of his times a literary model which served as a vehicle

for his enlightened views on the abuses and mistakes of the new Tudor government at home.

We can trace it again, more than a century after the *Utopia*, in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, which opens as follows: 'We sailed from Peru (where we had continued for the space of one whole year), for China and Japan, by the South Sea . . . knowing how that part of the South Sea was utterly unknown, and might have islands, or continents, that hitherto were not come to light'. We can trace it in Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Governour* (1531), a book dedicated to King Henry VIII, and discussing 'in our vulgar tongue the form of a just public weal, which matter I have gathered as well of the sayings of most noble authors (Greeks and Latins) as by mine own experience'. We can trace it in parts of George Gascoigne's *Steel Glass* (1576), of which Sir Walter Raleigh wrote that it,

impartially doth show
Abuses all to such as in it look,
From prince to poor, from high estate to low.

We can trace it in Raleigh himself, who found leisure to indite *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guinea* (1596). We trace it in scattered lines and passages of Shakespeare's plays—in

Thou call'dst me up at midnight to fetch dew
From the still-vex'd Bermoothes
Tempest, I., ii. 228-29,

recalling the recent discovery of the Bermudas; in Gonzalo's ideal commonwealth in the same play, with its echoes of the literary utopias founded

on mariners' tales; in Othello's stories to Desdemona's father

of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders,

Othello, I, iii. 143-45.

and, further, in Shakespeare's many metaphors and similes drawn from the sea, of which we may quote the following fine and eminently 'Elizabethan' example:

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge,
And in the visitation of the winds,
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them
With deafening clamours in the slippery clouds,
That, with the hurly, Death itself awakes?
Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude;
And in the calmest and most stillest night,
With all appliances and means to boot,
Deny it to a king?

II. King Henry IV, III, i. 18-30.

Is not this the living voice of the times when the galleons of Elizabeth's sea-captains wrought England's business in the deep?, adding the 'wet sea-boy' to Chaucer's gallery of portraits, with all the intervening history of sea-power and empire which his appearance implies to the imagination?

The indirect influence of the spirit of the age—the 'Zeitgeist', as the Germans call it—upon the writers who adorned it cannot be traced by examples, but must be inferred from events. And of these events the most imposing which occurred in

the sixteenth century was the decline of Spain as the chief European Power at sea, and the rise of England in her stead. The Pope, in 1493, had awarded the New World to Spain, and Prescott justly remarks in his *History of the Conquest of Mexico*,

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, Spain occupied perhaps the most prominent position in the theatre of Europe. . . . Under a system of salutary laws and an equitable administration, domestic tranquillity was secured, public credit established, trade, manufactures, and even the more elegant arts began to flourish; while a higher education called forth the first blossoms of that literature which was to ripen into so rich a harvest before the close of that century. Arms abroad kept pace with arts at home. Spain found her empire suddenly enlarged by important acquisitions both in Europe and Africa, while a New World beyond the waters poured into her lap treasures of countless wealth, and opened an unbounded field for honourable enterprise.—Book II, Chapter I.

The last remnant of the glory that was Spain's was forfeited in her brief and ignominious war with the United States of America at the close of the nineteenth century; the first and severest blow was sustained in her prime by the defeat of the 'Invincible' Armada at the close of the sixteenth. For less than a hundred years was Prescott's estimate true, though it included the year when Mary Tudor, Queen of England, sought to effect by marriage what her sister Elizabeth wrought by conquest, and gave her hand to the Catholic Prince, Philip II of Spain, the ruler of Spain and Portugal and the Provinces of the Netherlands, of Milan, Sicily, Tunis, Canary, Cape Verde, the Philippines, Mexico, Peru, Chili, and many other island-colonies. But Spain was

not a good colonizer. She persecuted, burnt, and tortured, in the name of the Church through the years when she should have been consolidating her empire abroad. She treated her colonies as a market for her own goods alone, whether such goods were in demand or not, and forbade them to manufacture or sell on their own account. Besides this vicious protective policy, restricting the free development of trade, there were Royal and Government monopolies which further hampered commerce, and encouraged all kinds of smuggling and piracy. The Inquisition at home accounted for the Jews and the Moors, the mainstays of her finance and manufactures; abroad, the Netherlands revolted in 1579; nine years later the Armada was destroyed, and every Spanish vessel laden with Colonial spoils might be attacked and robbed by the adventurous sea-dogs of England and the Netherlands. The melancholy end began; public credit was shattered, and even the population declined.

Charles Kingsley, in his *Westward Ho!*, a romance which may cordially be commended to all who wish to see a realistic picture of those days, hardly overstates the case when he writes: 'Had they [the Devonshire sea-captains] not first crippled, by their West Indian raids, the ill-gotten resources of the Spaniard, and then crushed his last huge effort in Britain's Salamis, the glorious fight of 1588, what had we been by now, but a Popish appanage of a world-tyranny as cruel as heathen Rome itself, and far more devilish?' A more sober account of the victory of England over Spain, and of its far-reaching effects on national

and universal history, may be read in the Third Appendix (between Chapters XLIV and XLV) of *The History of England* by the sagacious Hume. And a popular account may be taken from the narrative of John Richard Green, who writes in his *History of the English People* :

What Wolsey and Henry had struggled for, Elizabeth had done. At her accession England was scarcely reckoned among European powers. The wisest statesmen looked on her as doomed to fall into the hands of France, or to escape that fate by remaining a dependency of Spain. But the national independence had grown with the national life. France was no longer a danger, Scotland was no longer a foe. Instead of hanging on the will of Spain, England had fronted Spain and conquered her. She now stood on a footing of equality with the greatest powers of the world.—Book VI, chapter vi.

And, again :

The defeat of the Armada, the deliverance from Catholicism and Spain, marked the critical moment in our political development. From that hour England's destiny was fixed. She was to be a Protestant power. Her sphere of action was to be upon the seas. She was to claim her part in the New World of the West. But the moment was as critical in her intellectual development. As yet English literature had lagged behind the literature of the rest of Western Christendom. It was now to take its place among the greatest literature of the world. . . . With its new sense of security, its new sense of national energy and national power, the whole aspect of England suddenly changed. . . . The figures of warriors and statesmen were dwarfed by the grander figures of poets and philosophers.—*Ib.*, chapter vii.

Lastly, read the accounts in the third volume of *Social England* * of society and letters in the reign of Elizabeth. Two passages may be quoted from

* Edited by H. D. Traill. Cassell, 1895.

the essays contributed to this volume by Professor George Saintsbury. Writing of Elizabethan Society in the section called 'The New Order', he says :

Although it is beyond all doubt impossible to assign to any single moment such things as the rise of a middle class or the general extension of commerce, it is equally undoubted that the general notion which more or less dates and attributes these things in England from and to the reign of Elizabeth, is roughly and roundly correct. . . . There were, at home, the increase of population after the cessation of the violent checks imposed by the Black Death, the Hundred Years' War, and the Wars of the Roses ; the tendency towards breaking up pasture and towards enclosing ; the dissolution of the monasteries, and the consequent disturbance and re-heaping of national life ; the advance in domestic refinement and luxury ; the press ; and the great development given by these things and others to the secular side of the profession of the law. Abroad there was, before everything, the immense revolution and stimulus communicated and kept going by the discovery of America, and of the sea-route to the East. . . .

—Page 377.

and the Professor goes on to enumerate the openings for trade and the encouragement of national sentiment supplied by the war with Spain and other causes. In the same writer's chapter on Elizabethan Literature in the section called 'The Expansion of England', he says

All the exciting causes which were mentioned earlier may fairly be said to have made for literary production ; while there must be specially added to them the effects of the now considerably developed and diffused invention of printing. . . . Add the theatre, add the burning social and ecclesiastical controversies, add the fermenting force of the great political changes which were to take place in the seventeenth century, and it will at least appear that it would have been more odd if Elizabethan literature had not been great than surprising that it was.—Pages 530-31.

In the sentence from Matthew Arnold used as a motto for this chapter, we are told that the gift of literary genius lies 'in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere'. Our inquiries and quotations have helped us to discover the particular atmosphere and environment—intellectual and spiritual—of the age known as the Elizabethan. Our next task is to measure its degree of inspiration, and the quality of the literary genius which was thus inspired.

'Exuberant' is the epithet used by Mr. Sidney Lee (as by Hazlitt before him), writing on the subject of Elizabethan literature in the *Cambridge Modern History* (Vol. III, Chapter xi). 'For a short space', he declares, 'the highest intellectual and artistic ambitions of the English people had consciously or unconsciously concentrated themselves on literature' (*ibid.*, p. 382). This quality of 'exuberance', delightful and refreshing though it be, is embarrassing to those who are learning 'how to read' in times the reverse of exuberant. The children of an exiguous age, in which no great poet has arisen since Tennyson was carried to the Abbey, can hardly survey intelligently the field of Elizabethan literature from Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset, through Norton, Gascoigne, Gabriel Harvey, Spenser, Lyly, Sir Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe, Peele, Richard Hooker, Francis Bacon, Nash, Dekker, Ben Jonson, Greene, Fletcher, Massinger, Beaumont, George Chapman, John Marston, John Webster, Ford, Shirley, Shakespeare. How shall they measure this 'exuberance', these riches of a fruitful age, when

their wits and mete-rods have been fashioned to the products of a poorer soil? The milk which was poured so profusely from the full udders of those days is thin and watery to-day, and the vessels which receive it are less capacious in proportion. We cannot 'take it all in', this exuberance of Elizabethan literature. Our critical faculties have dwindled to the requirements of our own time. We speak of 'masterpieces of literature', and designate by that term products infinitely inferior to those of the giants of Elizabeth. We use the conventional epithets—'wonderful', 'beautiful', and the like—but the beauty and the wonder are in a different class. Measured even by the standard of mere bulk—the crudest and the coarsest that can be applied,—the writings of Spenser and Bacon, of Chapman and Shakespeare, have a wealth and a vastness which dwarf the slender grace of the books of the present generation.

Accordingly, in judging Elizabethan literature we must take bold and large views. We must expect a more full-bodied flavour, less nicety and refinement, less definiteness of design, a richer and fuller note, than mark the writers of our times. The Elizabethan may have 'worried' a sentence, he never 'worried' an idea; he may have played, in other words, with a conceit of style, in days when literary style was itself a recent importation; he did not beat thin the gold of thought. In the essay of Matthew Arnold, from which we have quoted above, he develops what is known as the 'touchstone-theory' of criticism. He takes certain lines and passages, that is to say, which are

characteristic or typical, and uses them as tests or 'touchstones' by which to appraise good letters. The books or authors to be judged must 'come up to sample', as it were, and reach the standard of excellence impressed by the types selected; otherwise, they are below the best. A similar method suggests itself for discovering the Elizabethan note. Can we postpone successfully the difficulty of a comprehensive survey, and form an estimate of Elizabethan literature by a few typical concrete examples? If 'exuberant' is the epithet which describes it, can we not illustrate this exuberance—which is a quality of thought, not of diction—in a manner which will fix the standard of the literature as a definite conception in our minds? For, allowing that the Elizabethans were artistic in construction, and preserved the right proportion between the parts and the whole, this method begs very little; it merely attempts to estimate the scale and style of a building from a few characteristic bricks.

Take, for instance, two passages from the plays of Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), the short-lived genius who died in his thirtieth year, when Shakespeare was just beginning to write his series of dramas. The first is taken from his *Faustus*, and is spoken by the hero to Helen:

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies!
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.
I will be Paris, and for love of thee,

Instead of Troy, shall Wertenberg be sack'd ;
And I will combat with weak Menelaus,
And wear thy colours on my pluméd crest ;
Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel,
And then return to Helen for a kiss.
Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars ;
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
When he appear'd to hapless Semele ;
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms :
And none but thou shalt be my paramour !

Consider this passage as a whole, and consider its parts in detail ; try to attend, not so much to the actual argument and phrases—the kiss raised to the *n*th degree of efficacious satisfaction, the lover's torrent of protestation, his single and purposeful resolve—as to the general impression which the speech creates, its aim and effect in art, the kind or class of literature to which it characteristically belongs. It is violent, flooding, overwhelming. A less richly dowered imagination might have used each sentence for a paragraph, might well have been content in times of exiguous fancy to have used the associations evoked by the images in the first two lines as the basis of all he had to say, instead of seeking further images—without a sign of effort or exhaustion—in Semele and Arethusa. How reckless of economy must the poetic faculty be which can afford to compress the epic story of Helen's fatal beauty into one magnificent sentence ! 'the face that launch'd a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium'. And how strong and forceful is the imagery of the following lines : 'suck forth my soul : see where it flies !' ; 'heaven is in these

lips'; 'all is dross that is not Helena'; 'the beauty of a thousand stars' (note, a second time, Marlowe's vague wealth of 'a thousand'); 'flaming Jupiter'; 'wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms'; and, finally, the bare and almost brutal strength of the concluding line, 'and none but thou shalt be my paramour'.

The second passage is from Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*:

Nature, that framed us of four elements
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds;
Our souls whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world,
And measure every wandering planet's course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Will us to wear ourselves and never rest.

This is in a different kind from the speech of Faust, but it displays the same quality of power; it suggests the same impression of strength in reserve, of drafts from an unexhausted reservoir, of a stream gushing without let or hindrance, without respect to economy in expenditure, to the expediency of sparing and saving, of keeping *this* image in case of need, of using *that* for a particular direction, of amplifying one thought lest another should fail to succeed. 'Every wandering planet's course' is enough about physical philosophy; 'climbing after knowledge infinite' is enough about the metaphysics, as the 'thousand ships' and the 'thousand stars' were enough for the imagery of love.

Our third selection is from Bacon, out of his preface to the *Great Instauration*, and we propose

to contrast it with a piece of modern prose in an opposite style :

Of ourselves we say nothing ; but for the matter which is treated, we desire that men should regard it not as an opinion, but as a work, and should be assured that we are laying the foundation not of any sect or theory, but of that which conduces to the use and dignity of man. Next, we desire that, laying aside their jealousies and prejudices, they may fairly consult their own common advantage, and having been rescued by us from the errors and obstacles of their road and furnished with our defence and assistance, they may themselves participate in the labours that yet remain. Moreover, that they may be strong in hope, and not imagine that our *Instauratio* is something infinite and beyond the reach of man, when it is really an end and legitimate termination to infinite error, and is so far mindful of the mortal lot of man that it does not hope to accomplish its work within the period of a single life, but leaves this to succeeding times ; when, moreover, it does not arrogantly search for science in the narrow cells of human wit, but humbly in the greater world.

This is Bacon's, and it is remarkable for a certain profuse directness, a scorn of calculation and literary accountancy, characteristic of the age. 'Of ourselves we say nothing', and nothing accordingly is said, without further apology or amplification. The matter treated is to be regarded 'not as an opinion, but as a work', as 'the foundation not of any sect or theory, but of that which conduces to the use and dignity of man'. How confident, how direct, and how complete !; Bacon says all he means, and has nothing to condone or to explain away. And then he is not afraid of the appeal to hope and time, the great regions in which the individual life is lost. Mr. A. J. Balfour, like Bacon, is also by way of being a statesman and a philosopher, and, though the comparison is

unjust, and would be deprecated by Mr. Balfour first of all, it seems worth while in this place to quote a few sentences from his 'Preliminary' to *The Foundations of Belief*. He opens as follows :

As its title imports, the following Essay is intended to serve as an introduction to the study of Theology. The word 'Introduction', however, is *ambiguous*; *and in order that the reader may be as little disappointed as possible with the contents of the book*, the sense in which I here use it *must be first explained*. Sometimes, by an introduction to a subject is meant a brief survey of its leading principles. . . . For such a task, however, in the case of theology *I have no qualifications*. . . . If the reader is tempted to complain of the extreme conciseness with which some topics of the greatest importance are touched on, and the apparent irrelevance with which others have been introduced, *I hope he will reserve his judgment until he has read to the end, should his patience hold out so long*.

The phrases which we have underlined justify the comparison suggested, for the contrast is not between Mr. Balfour's and Bacon's degrees of philosophical equipment, but between the attitude of approach assumed by the Victorian and the Elizabethan. The Victorian explains, and apologizes, and tries to mollify his reader; the Elizabethan straightly declares 'of ourselves we say nothing', and if it be assumed that the balance of modesty is on the Victorian side, Bacon's search for science, 'not arrogantly in the cells of human wit, but humbly in the greater world', reminds us that an obsequious deportment is not identical with humility of mind. The real contrast lies between the exuberance of a full age, and the parsimony of exhausted invention.

A more fruitful comparison of style may be found by reading Bacon's preface and a passage

from Walter Pater (1839-94) in immediate succession. Pater was a humanist of the nineteenth century, as Bacon was a humanist of the sixteenth, but Bacon's profuse directness in writing was in striking contrast with the allusive languors of Walter Pater's style—a contrast which may be considered independently of the difference in their degrees of genius. Read the passage from Bacon through again, noting its generous simplicity, its secure confidence, and its courageous seriousness, and now take the following passage which occurs towards the close of Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* :

Throughout that elaborate and lifelong education of his receptive powers, he had ever kept in view the purpose of preparing himself towards possible further revelation some day :—towards some ampler vision, which should take up into itself and explain this world's delightful shows, as the scattered fragments of a poetry, till then but half-understood, might be taken up into the text of a lost epic, recovered at last. At this moment, his unclouded receptivity of soul, grown so steadily through all those years, from experience to experience, was at its height ; the house ready for the possible guest ; the tables of the mind white and smooth, for whatsoever divine fingers might choose to write there. And was not this precisely the condition, the attitude of mind, to which something higher than he, yet akin to him, would be likely to reveal itself ; to which that influence he had felt now and again, like a friendly hand upon his shoulder amid the actual obscurities of the world, would be likely to make a further explanation ? Surely, the aim of a true philosophy must lie, not in futile efforts towards the complete accommodation of man to the circumstances in which he chances to find himself, but in the maintenance of a kind of candid discontent, in the face of the very highest achievement ; the unclouded and receptive soul quitting the world finally, with the same fresh wonder with which it had entered the world still unimpaired, and going on its blind way at last with the consciousness of some profound enigma in things, as but a pledge of something further to come.

Steep yourself in the incense of that prose after the transparent buoyancy of Bacon, and you will realize something of the contrast between the cloistral seclusion of Victorian scholarship and the unashamed serenity of the Elizabethans. It was said of Plato that he brought philosophy from heaven to earth; it might be said of Elizabethan writers that they secularized thought. When Bacon wrote his work 'not for any sect or theory, but for the use and dignity of man', he wrote, not for an audience of scholars, but for the public of his day—a public, it is true, which existed before the era of the Reform Acts and of the Elementary Education Acts, but a public nevertheless co-extensive with the English people, as they were reckoned in that age. Walter Pater, and other thinkers in the Victorian epoch, could not trust their audience so confidently. We saw Mr. Balfour bowing and scraping to a public which might be impatient, or which might impute to him an inconvenient degree of self-esteem; and we see in the foregoing passage how Pater—scorning the populace—chose his words with the care of the student rather than the instinct of a public man; how he appealed, that is to say, to a select audience of scholars, living apart from the busy world, rather than to the world at large. Bacon transported thought from the study to the market-place, because the reading public of his times was moulded in a mood to receive tidings from the heights; Pater recalled scholars from the busy haunts of men to receive the fragrant and delicate homage of his flowers of style. His indefinite adjectives of quality, 'possible', 'some', 'whatsoever',

his 'possible further revelation some day', his 'some ampler vision which should explain this world's delightful shows', his image of 'a lost epic, recovered at last', his 'unclouded receptivity of the soul, grown so steadily through all these years, from experience to experience', his 'influence like a friendly hand amid the actual obscurities of the world', his 'kind of candid discontent', his 'blind war', his 'consciousness of some profound enigma in things'—these half-veiled sentences of a scholar speaking to an audience of scholars, this Virgilian subtlety of style which conceals the processes of thought by which its meaning is revealed, is as different as possible from the plainness of Bacon's prose. It is a difference to be felt, rather than to be expressed; a difference of atmosphere and environment, the difference between the pride of a confident exuberance and the pride of a punctilious exclusiveness; between the air of a Swiss mountain-side, cultivated from summit to base, where sturdy peasants, their children around them, toil freely under heaven, and the air of an enclosed garden in an Italian valley, where monks, working alone beneath sweet-smelling trees, produce the fruits and juices which furnish our 'liqueurs'. We are not belittling our own times, least of all, the rare genius and exotic talent of Walter Pater. But for the right understanding of the Elizabethan age this sense of 'exuberance' must be felt, or how shall we reconcile our reticence with the frankness of Juliet?; how shall we seize the content of such phrases of Shakespeare as the following:

Down on your knees,
And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love.
As You Like It, IV, v.

She pin'd in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat, like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

Twelfth Night, II, iv.

Methinks, it were an easy leap
To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon ;
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks.

King Henry IV, Part I, I, iii.

An old man broken with the storms of state
Is come to lay his weary bones among ye ;
Give him a little earth for charity.

King Henry VIII, IV, ii.

Let me have men about me that are fat ;
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights.

Julius Cæsar, I, ii.

O let him pass ! he hates him
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer.

King Lear, V, iii.

My hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnardine,
Making the green one red.

Macbeth, II, ii.

These examples might be multiplied, and every man's own reading will improve them ; but enough has been quoted to show the profusion of imagery and the directness of diction which mark the Elizabethan note in the history of English literature. We do not pretend that men in Elizabeth's reign expressed their ordinary thoughts in Shakespearean language : this was Shakespeare's ' voluntary ', his gift to his age ; but at least they thought

in Shakespearean moulds ; and his actors did not need to mouth their parts nor to walk upon his stage on stilts in order to be understood of the people. There were a national sentiment, an exaltation of thought and feeling, a fire in the blood, a muscular and an intellectual excitement, which corresponded to and reacted upon the dramatist's demands. There are no ambiguities or reserves in the phrases which we have culled from the full treasury of Shakespeare—no twilight timidity, no reek of the lamp. To ' thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love ', is a benediction straight from eternity, comprehensive and complete, and unrestrained by any convention of sentiment or fashion. In the white radiance of that faith, the shadows of experience disappear, so true it is, in the words of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), a poet of a later revelation, that

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.

How fine and satisfying is the simile in the second extract above, ' like Patience on a monument, smiling at grief ' ! ; how extravagant and adventurous, even in exuberant times, the language of the third, ' it were an easy leap to pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon ' ! ; how simply grand—a grandeur of the skies at night—the effect in the fourth of the ' old man broken by the storms of state ' asking ' a little earth for charity ' ! ; how daring and dramatic the conception of the fifth ! ;—and through them all an absence of self-consciousness, a sense of fulness and directness, an insatiable

appetite for truth, without respect to consequences and without regard to expediency.

This is the Elizabethan spirit at its best, and something of the spirit must be recovered if we are to appreciate its literature. In the next chapter we shall try to follow the development of that literature in the lives and works of those who made it. Here we have tried to indicate the spirit of the age, to clutch at some indication, however impalpable, and evanescent, of the quality and parts of that 'atmosphere' and 'order of ideas', in the happy use of which lies the work of literary genius. Add to this the teaching of history as to the England and the London of that day—the brilliant court, the squalor of the poor, the violence of faction, the perils of adventure, the terror of the axe,—and the present preparation is complete.

CHAPTER V

CYNTHIA AND HER SHEPHERDS

'It is difficult to paint the many-coloured incongruities of England at that epoch. Yet in the midst of this confusion rose cavaliers like Sidney, philosophers like Bacon, poets like Spenser; men in whom all that is pure, elevated, subtle, tender, strong, wise, delicate, and learned in our modern civilization displayed itself'.

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS.

CLASSIFICATION is always dangerous, because poets and other writers do not necessarily observe the rules which are made for them by their critics. The critic, reviewing a period of literature, is naturally anxious to arrange its events in a certain order of perspective. He aims, as he should aim, at gaining a clear view of the field to be surveyed, and at giving definite information to the students who seek his guidance. He may even develop or invent a 'theory' to suit the facts; he may take, that is to say, a single aspect of his theme and group the rest of the facts around it, and he may be so much in love with his theory and the ingenuity with which he works it out that he tends to resent the unwillingness of any part of his material to be dovetailed into his scheme. His theory becomes to him more important than the facts on which it is founded, and he forgets that the writers whom he is discussing did their work and lived their lives without the advantage of knowing

the particular theory of literary development which he would employ them to illustrate. Thus, when we read of rules and exceptions in literary history, or when the writers in any age are summed up by a general formula and subdivided into watertight compartments, we must not be surprised if they prove in places a little obstinate or reluctant. We must not expect the disorder and confusion of a productive era and the thousand chances of inspiration and imitation to adapt themselves readily and uniformly to any scheme or chart which a critic's ingenuity can devise. The more rigid the theory, the less valuable is the criticism likely to be.

This warning is preparatory to saying that English literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries cannot be read at second-hand. Any account of the subject must be inadequate to it, and must be vitiated by the fact that it tries to impose a sequence and a regularity upon the products of exuberant genius. The utmost that can be done, when the Elizabethan atmosphere has been realized, is to indicate the kinds of literature which flourished at that time, and the chief writers in each kind.

Two classes seem to emerge from the busy life of the age. They correspond to a distinction based on actual conditions. We referred in the last chapter to the idea of the Maiden Queen, repeating in her own person the stately isolation of Protestant England among the Catholic countries of Europe. We saw how that idea seized and fired the imagination of her court, lending splendour to its pageants and romance to its deeds, so

that the suave tongue of every courtier and the stout arm of every captain were devoted to the service of one mistress—to the greater glory of Elizabeth. A literature sprang from these conditions, and is adorned by the names of Wyatt, Surrey, Lyly, Sidney, Spenser. But we have likewise referred to the growth of a national sentiment, to the secularization of learning, and to the people's awakening. The progress of the Court from one castle to another, the masques and games at Kenilworth and other country seats where the favoured lieges of Elizabeth vied with one another in her welcome, brought with them a corresponding zest for entertainment among the people. Trade was prosperous, money circulated, men lived intensely in those days; and, accordingly, the literature of the court was balanced by a literature of the populace, and the rude Elizabethan stage was adorned by the performances of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and their followers.

The difference between these two classes of literature is clearly marked in Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*—itself a literary monument of the age—written about 1581, and published in 1595. Sidney asks 'why England (the Mother of excellent minds) should be grown so hard a step-mother to Poets', and he goes on to denounce the tragedies and comedies of his times:

For where the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept, and common reason, but one day: there is both many days and many places inartificially imagined . . . We shall have Asia on the one side, and Africa on the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the Player, when he cometh in, must ever begin by telling where he is. . . . We shall have three ladies walk to

gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by, we hear news of shipwreck in the same place, and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. . . . Two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field. . . . But besides these gross absurdities, how all their plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies ! ; mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders, to play a part in majestic matters, with neither decency nor discretion.

To us, accustomed to a theatre in which scenery counts for so much, and in which a lapse of time or a removal in space is a regular feature of the stage-directions on the programme, Sidney's views of 'decency and discretion', as applied to dramatic composition, appear—in the mildest sense—old-fashioned. But two condoning circumstances must be remembered. In the first place, Sidney was writing before—however shortly before—the great era of Elizabethan drama ; and in the second place he was writing in a period of confused literary ideals. English literature was searching for expression in the midst of England's evolution from the mediæval to the modern spirit. The men who bore the torch of letters were at the moment more concerned with the *manner* than with the *matter* of their message. Sidney himself was a member of a club known as the Areopagus, which had as its object the naturalization in English verse of the prosody of classical antiquity. Thus, in the *Apologie*, he writes of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* that, though it has 'much poetry' and is 'worthy the reading', yet the framing of its style 'to an old rustic language I dare not allow, since neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin,

Sanazar in Italian, did affect it'. This objection, stated so seriously, seems ludicrous to-day, nor can we think of it as touching the fame or inspiration, say, of Shakespeare in the very age in which Sidney wrote. To Shakespeare and his brother playwrights the scruples of the purists of the Areopagus failed to make an appeal. These broke through the 'unities' of space and time with an inspired contempt for the strict precepts of Aristotle. To them it mattered not a whit what Virgil or Theocritus affected. Their purpose was achieved if they pleased an Elizabethan audience. Shakespeare's literary club was the bar of the Mermaid Tavern; and he solidified his own deserts at New Place, Stratford-on-Avon.

Thus, the writers for the Court are to be distinguished from the writers for the people. The conditions of Elizabethan life, which witnessed among other changes the emergence of a middle-class, make this distinction essential. But within the circle of the Court, bounded by the primary duty of keeping the Queen amused, there were self-contained circles little superior to literary cliques which were distinguished from one another. And, further, as the Court changed with the increasing age of the Queen, and with the increased definiteness of political issues, certain conventions changed likewise. We shall come back to this later on. Here it is enough to note that, leaving aside for the moment the expression of popular taste in dramatic performances, we have to follow the development of Court literature along various lines, terminating at a common point in the dissolution of the Court itself.

The first thread to take up is that of the TRANSLATORS. Their sudden prominence is due to the secularization of learning, to the advent of lay scholars in the universities, and of learned laymen in public life. Another contributing cause, though of a negative character, was the absence of a definite purpose in political affairs during Elizabeth's early years. The question, *Quo, Musa, tendis?*, had not yet found a reply. There was no clear tendency in art. Things were drifting to an unseen end; or, rather, the forces were directed by hands which concealed the aim, and which only gradually turned the growing national sentiment and personal devotion to Elizabeth into the direction of sea-power and imperialism. During these tentative years, men cast about for inspiration, and their talents, 'wasting' for use, were readily employed in translating into serviceable English the works of ancient Greece and Rome, and of modern Spain and Italy.

Another thread to be disentangled is that of the MISCELLANIES. The period of experimentation in style even more than in subject demanded and produced a means for the publication and circulation of miscellaneous collections of writings. There was a real exuberance of talent in those days, especially of a talent for light poetry. The wind from Italy blew where it listed, and scattered the seeds in all directions. The resulting flowers are found in a score of Elizabethan song-books, of which the most famous, perhaps, are *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557), *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576), *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* (1578), *A Handful of Pleasant Delights* (1584),

and the *Helicon* and *Parnassus* of the last year of the sixteenth century. Mr. A. H. Bullen, the critic and editor, has examined these collections with skilled scholarship and taste, and has virtually revealed their beauties to the present generation*, and the high level sustained by the examples he selects is really remarkable, considering the occasional and ephemeral character which this kind of writing bore.

A third thread in this labyrinth is that of the EUPHUISTS. Here we come to definite names and a deliberate purpose. Let us keep clearly in mind that the necessity had arisen at Court of creating an English style in prose. For while poetry had hardly been written in England since *The Canterbury Tales*, prose had hardly been written at all. Moreover, apart from Chaucer's tradition, the times were poetical in tendency. The forces that direct this tendency are difficult to determine. They can only be inferred from the observation of events, and probably they depend on an excitement of national life, or a kind of rush of blood, as it were, producing a mood of exaltation of which poetry is the literary language. However this may be, the great writers of this age were pre-eminently poets. There were always sober and worthy men, like Roger Ascham, the schoolmaster, who were content to set out their matter in plain English unadorned; men like Puttenham, the critic, whose treatise on *The Arte of English Poesie* was meritorious and illuminating, or like Holinshed, the chronicler, in whose garden Shakespeare was

* See *Lyrics from Elizabethan Song-Books*. By A. H. Bullen. Lawrence and Bullen.

so busy, but their pedestrian labours were left behind by the poets. Bacon's philosophy and essays are Jacobean or Caroline in date, and, though Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* is properly Elizabethan, it does not change the character of the age which is crowned by Spenser and Shakespeare. Still, the wits wanted a prose style, and in the deliberate satisfaction of this definite requirement lies the secret of that much-abused movement commonly known as Euphuism. The wits wanted a prose style and one of the Court cliques was ready to supply it. John Lyly was attached to the Court and was a Master of Arts of Cambridge. Thus, he was doubly pre-disposed to adopt what may be termed the literary view of letters; the view which would have moulded literature, as in vogue at the Court, to the academic theories of University scholars instead of watching it develop on spontaneous lines. From Cambridge there came the learned theories of style, diction, and metre of which Gabriel Harvey, of the Areopagus, was the leading pedant and extremist. Happily, though Sir Philip Sidney was an Areopagite, and though Spenser coquetted with the temptation, the native genius of Elizabethan poetry was too strong for its current to be diverted by artificial rules.

In prose, which was less susceptible to wholesome breezes from without, the faddists had a freer hand. *Euphuës: the Anatomy of Wit*, was published in 1579, and *Euphuës and his England* in the following year. In these 'precious' productions, and in the books which imitated them, the merry game of 'hunting the letter', as it was called by

a contemporary, with all the attendant affectations of antithesis, simile, and alliteration, was pursued with the vigour—misdirected—characteristic of Elizabeth's age. The prose style which was wanted was supplied with thorough-going turbidness. Lyly's fluency was Elizabethan; the channel which he chose was that of the *alto estilo*, or 'tall style', of Antonio de Guevara (1490-1545), the Spanish author of *The Dial of Princes*. This treatise derived importance from the high position of its writer as confessor to Charles V of Spain in the years before the Armada, and it was translated into all European tongues, the chief English version being effected by Sir Thomas North in 1557. Here, then, we have the antecedents of the Euphuists in England. Guevara traced his use of antithesis to the practice of Latin authors, especially, perhaps, to Seneca's development of Ciceronian prose. In Guevara the model was caricatured. To this he added a native talent for florid and rhetorical conceits, a prolixity, pomposity, and wordiness, a trick of alliteration and of letter-hunting, an elaboration of metaphorical expression, and a gift for sententiousness and platitude, which suited the learned wits of Elizabeth's Court at a time when their leisure was plentiful, when there were new things under the sun, and when the new critical faculty was being sharpened to various uses.

It would be unhistorical, however, to dismiss Lyly with dispraise. Apart from a quaint and an original vein which stood his writings in good stead, the author of the two *Euphuus* books certainly laid the lines of a prose-style which has exerted

considerable influence for good on succeeding writers to this day. He was superlatively praised by writers like William Webbe in the *Discourse of English Poetry* (1586); like Thomas Dekker in his *Gull's Horn Book* (1609), in which brilliant pamphlet Euphuism is mentioned as the accepted language of the Court, or like Edward Blount, who declared (1632) in a preface to Lyly's plays, 'that Beauty in Court which could not parley Euphuism was as little regarded as she which now there speaks not French'. Equally significant, perhaps, is the ridicule which was the converse of the praise. Ben Jonson in *Every Man out of his Humour* and Shakespeare in *Love's Labour Lost* parody the affectations of Euphuism, deliberately introduced by Lyly to the wits of Elizabeth's Court as the successor in the new age to the antiquated cults of allegory and chivalry, and as the *arbiter elegantiarum* in wit, language, and manners.

Let us take for examples some passages from Shakespeare's plays and a passage from *Euphuism: the Anatomy of Wit* itself. In Act I, Scene ii, of the exquisite *Love's Labour Lost*, Don Adriano de Armado, 'a fantastical Spaniard', and Moth, his page, are discussing the signs of love:

ARM. Boy, what sign is it when a man of great spirit grows melancholy?

MOTH. A great sign, sir, that he will look sad.

ARM. Why, sadness is one and the self-same thing, dear imp.

MOTH. No, no; O Lord, sir, no.

ARM. How canst thou part sadness and melancholy, my tender juvenal?

MOTH. By a familiar demonstration of the working, my tough senior.

ARM. Why tough senior? why tough senior?

MOTH. Why tender juvenal? why tender juvenal?

ARM. I spoke it, tender juvenal, as a congruent epitheton appertaining to thy young days, which we may nominate tender.

MOTH. And I, tough senior, as an appertinent title to your old time, which we may name tough.

ARM. Pretty and apt.

MOTH. How mean you, sir? I pretty and my saying apt? or I apt, and my saying pretty?

ARM. Thou pretty, because little.

MOTH. Little pretty, because little. Wherefore apt?

ARM. And therefore apt, because quick.

MOTH. Why, sir, is this such a piece of study? now here is three studied, ere ye'll thrice wink: and how easy it is to put years to the word three, and study three years in two words, the dancing horse will tell you.

ARM. A most fine figure!

MOTH. To prove you a cipher.

ARM. I will hereupon confess I am in love: and as it is base for a soldier to love, so am I in love with a base wench. If drawing my sword against the humour of affection would deliver me from the reprobate thought of it, I would take Desire prisoner, and ransom him to any French courtier for a new-devised courtesy. I think scorn to sigh: methinks I should outswear Cupid.

Here, then, we have the pith and essence of Court Euphuism, the deliberate affectation of the wits whose privilege it was to compete for Elizabeth's smile. Shakespeare dots the i's and crosses the t's of its conceits in his *Merry Wives of Windsor*, where, being commanded by Queen Elizabeth 'to write a play of Sir John Falstaff in love', he makes love's new dialect ridiculous by pouring it full-flood from the lips of that 'mountain of mummy'. Falstaff boasts himself adept 'not only in the simple office of love, but in all the accoutrement, complement, and ceremony of it', and the 'fat' knight woos Mrs. Ford with true euphuistic extravagance:

MRS. FORD. I your lady, Sir John ! alas, I should be a pitiful lady !

FALSTAFF. Let the court of France show me such another. I see how thine eye would emulate the diamond : thou hast the right arched beauty of the brow that becomes the ship-tire, the tire-valiant, or any tire of Venetian admittance.

MRS. FORD. A plain kerchief, Sir John : my brows become nothing else ; not that well neither.

FALSTAFF. By the Lord, thou art a traitor to say so : thou wouldst make an absolute courtier ; and the firm fixture of thy foot would give an excellent motion to thy gait in a semicircled farthingale. I see what thou wert, if Fortune thy foe were not, Nature thy friend. Come, thou canst not hide it.

MRS. FORD. Believe me, there's no such thing in me.

Falstaff, again, in the *Second Part of King Henry IV*, declares (Act I, Scene ii) ' I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men ', and in both parts of that drama he speaks the language of the wits :

' though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth the more it is wasted the sooner it wears. . . . For, Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink but in tears, not in pleasure but in passion, not in words only, but in woes also '.

I King Henry IV, II. iv.

Passages not dissimilar to this are scattered throughout Shakespeare's earlier plays, as, for instance, in Portia's talk with Nerissa in Act I of *The Merchant of Venice*, and the research of scholars is rapidly accumulating evidence to prove the influence of Lyly on Shakespeare, not merely in his manner, but in his matter.*

* See *The Complete Works of John Lyly*. Edited by R. Warwick Bond ; Introduction to Vol. I. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

We now come to the passage from Lyly himself, and select in illustration the following :

Althoughe hetherto *Euphues* I haue shrined thee in my heart for a trustie friende, I will shunne thee heerafter as a trothles foe, and although I cannot see in thee lesse witte then I was wont, yet doe I finde lesse honestie, I perceiue at the last (although beeing deceiued it be to late) that Muske although it be sweet in the smell is sower in the smacke, that the leafe of the *Cedar* tree though it be faire to be seene, yet the siroppe depriueth sight, that friendshippe though it be plighted by shaking the hande, yet it is shaken off by fraude of the heart. But thou hast not much to boaste off, for as thou hast wonne a fickle Lady, so hast thou lost a faythfull friende. How canst thou be secure of hir constancie when thou hast had such tryall of hir lyghtenesse ?

Howe canst thou assure thy selfe that she will be faithfull to thee, which hath bene faithlesse to mee ? Ah *Euphues*, let not my credulytie be an occasion heerafter for thee to practise the lyke crueltie. Remember this that yet ther hath neuer bene any faithles to his friend, that hath not also bene fruitelesse to his God. But I waye this trechery the lesse, in that it commeth from a *Grecian* in whome is no trothe. Thoughe I be to weake to wrastle for a reuenge, yet God who permitteth no guyle to be guyltlesse, will shortly requite this iniury, thoughe *Philautus* haue no pollycie to vndermine thee, yet thine owne practises will be sufficient to ouerthrow thee.

Couldst thou *Euphues* for the loue of a fruitelesse pleasure, vyolate the league of faythfull friendshippe ? Diddest thou waye more the entising lookes of a lewd wenche, then the entyre loue of a loyal friende ?

The characteristics need hardly be pointed out except to mention that the illustration from the 'cedar-tree' is one among countless examples of Lyly's trick of seeking metaphors and similes from nature and from natural history. Pliny's pages were ransacked by him in his search for the facts and fables of animal life, and his discoveries in this field add a quaintness to his style which was already

precious enough. A few of the most obvious parallelisms may be represented in double columns :

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| <i>shrined</i> | <i>shunne</i> |
| <i>trustie</i> | <i>trothles</i> |
| <i>friende</i> | <i>foe</i> |
| <i>credulitie</i> | <i>crueltie.</i> |
| <i>faithles</i> | <i>fruitelesse</i> |
| <i>trechery</i> | <i>trothe</i> |
| <i>loue</i> | <i>league</i> |
| <i>entising</i> | <i>entyre</i> |
| <i>lookes</i> | <i>love</i> |
| <i>lewd</i> | <i>loyall</i> |

There is, further, the equipoise of the balance in

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| sweet in the smell . . . | sower in the smacke |
| faire to be seene . . . | depriueth sight |
| thou hast wonne . . . | hast thou lost |
| undermine . . . | ouerthrow |

and the whole passage is marked by that exaggerated regard for the presentation of ideas in striking and artificial forms which is associated with the style of the Euphuists.

The style—when its obvious mannerisms had been abandoned—proved of the utmost use in the development of English prose-composition, alike in its clear arrangement of words, which pruned the luxuriant garrulousness of earlier and less formal writers, as in the more complicated business of sentence-building and the elaboration of paragraphs. No great prose writer, it may fairly be said, is free from obligation to Lyly in what may be called the logic of style. The example was set with more than due emphasis and exaggeration ; but when these marks had been dropped, English writers from Dryden and Addison, through Burke

and Macaulay to Newman, owe their sense of the flexibility of the English language in prose to John Lyly and his contemporaries*.

Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* forms another reply to the demand for a prose style by Elizabeth's courtiers, who were turning their wit to new devices of flattery and love ; and ROMANCE, accordingly, is a fourth thread to be distinguished in the literature of this many-sided age. It is a movement associated with greater works, but reaching a more abrupt conclusion ; for, if the Lyly tradition continues imperceptibly in our prose to this day, the romantic style of the *Arcadia* and, secondarily, of the *Faerie Queen*, has never been merged in the general characteristics of English literature, though it is revived from time to time by poets who affect the old pastoral sentiment derived ultimately from Sicily†. We have seen, and we shall see again in the next chapter, how the memories of mediæval sentiment and tradition conspired with the realities of modern life to prepare a difficult path for the liberated spirit of the Englishman of Elizabeth's age. Such a spirit, moving in the region where effective vigour was neutralized by the equipoise between the old and the new, was that which wore for two-and-thirty years the gallant form of Philip Sidney, perhaps the most attractive figure in the gallery of English letters, and among the most brilliant of the stars which

* Thomas Dekker, a prolific writer in Elizabeth's age, speaks in his *Gull's Horn-Book* of 'the Arcadian and Euphuized gentlewomen' who 'have their tongues sharpened'. The allusion is typical.

† As in Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

drew their light from Elizabeth. He lived from 1554-1586. He was the son of Sir Henry Sidney, thrice Lord Deputy of Ireland, and owner of Penshurst Place, and his mother was a daughter of the Duke of Northumberland, executed by Queen Mary, and sister to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Elizabeth's notorious favourite. Philip, after being educated at Shrewsbury and Christ Church, Oxford, was employed on diplomatic missions in Poland, Venice, and elsewhere, and was the trusted friend of artists, statesmen and kings, including Herbert Languet (1518-1581) the Protestant humanist, with whom he maintained an intimate correspondence on an intellectual level, Tintoretto (1518-1594), and Paul Veronese (1528-1588), Italian painters, and William of Orange (1533-1584), whose proverbial silence yielded to the fascination of Sidney. Hakluyt dedicated to him the famous books of *Voyages*, Spenser his *Astrophel*, and Giordano Bruno two of his learned volumes. He subscribed to Frobisher's second Arctic expedition he accompanied the Queen to Kenilworth; he flirted with the pedants of the Areopagus and quarrelled with the Earl of Oxford, leader of a rival clique; he fell under Elizabeth's displeasure, and retired to the home of his sister, Mary, Lady Pembroke; he returned to Court in 1581, the year in which Languet died and the correspondence ceased; he married the daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham, the Secretary of State; was forbidden by the Queen to join Drake's expedition to America, and finally succumbed to a wound received in his country's service at Zutphen in the Netherlands, thus adding a hero's death to the re-

cord of gentleness and nobility almost unparalleled in a life so short. For Sir Philip Sidney, the author of *Arcadia*, of the *Apologie for Poetrie*, and of a sonnet sequence entitled *Astrophel and Stella*, was not merely a writer nor a patron of books. He was, above all, an influence. His family connections helped him to acquire that position; his tastes and character did the rest. He has been described without exaggeration as 'the *beau idéal* of the courtier, soldier, and scholar', and more than two hundred poetical memorials were evoked in that fluent age by his too early death.

In this brief account of the chief incidents in Sir Philip Sidney's career, two observations are obvious. He had to fight with a temptation to a dreamy dilettantism, and he had to seek an outlet for his love of adventure, cramped by the artificialities of the Court to which he was attached. Here, then, is the point where his life touched the history of English literature. In his treatise, the *Arcadia*, he sought to satisfy with the pen what was forbidden to his sword, and to claim his part in the adventures of Drake, Raleigh, and their peers. The *Arcadia*, at the same time, was designed to illustrate the literary theories of the author of the *Apologie for Poetrie*, who did not 'dare to allow' the language of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, and who was a member of the clique headed by Gabriel Harvey. Lastly, and akin to this aim, the *Arcadia* proposed a fresh solution of the Elizabethan problem of a prose style by connecting it more consciously than Lyly's Euphuism with the problem of conduct. If courtiers would lead 'romantic' lives, the Court would speak the language of Romance; in other

words, if the old ideals of chivalry could be adapted to the new age of commerce, exploration, and foreign conquest, an heroic tongue could be fashioned for their expression. To this ideal world at least Sidney was content to retire from the jealous perplexities of Court life, till he exchanged the fabled rivers of Arcadia for the streams of Paradise, hardly more remote from his fancy, or less clearly visualized in his faith.

The *Arcadia* is a work of fiction, in which the plot is obscurely elaborated, the style is affected and in places repellent, and the pastoral element is partly a protest against what Languet described in one of his letters to Sidney as 'the troubles that hamper and engross all that live within the circle of government'. Yet, these defects apart, it possesses—together with the *Sonnets*—a distinct claim on our attention. It marks the beginning of English fiction, with its love-plot and female characters, which Richardson and Fielding were to develop and the nineteenth century was to consummate. It added to the resources of the English language, or, rather to the equipment of its inheritors; and, chiefly, it served to help the dramatic genius of the age, then just preening its wings to soar. As Professor Courthope reminds us:

The pale and almost bodiless phantoms which floated vaguely before the imagination in the romance, touched by the magic wand of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, acquired colour, beauty, poetry, life. The gentle pastoral landscape of a non-existent country reappeared in the ideal forest of Arden, in the enchanted island of Prospero, in a Bohemia bordered by the sea.

Nor was the debt confined to hints of 'sentiment and landscape'. The story and plot were utilized for the purposes of drama, and an indirect tribute was paid to the influence of Sidney's *Arcadia* by Beaumont and Fletcher in their *Cupid's Revenge*, and by Shakespeare in *King Lear*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and other plays.

Thus, the early period of Elizabeth, when the Queen herself was young and dominated the imagination as she scaled the intellect of her Court, was distinguished by literary experiments. These took various forms, the chief of which were the Euphuism invented by John Lyly and the Romance invented by Sir Philip Sidney. The miscellaneous writers of that age—omitting the greater names and the playwrights as such—included Translators, Sonneteers, Lyric Poets, and Moral and Historical writers, of whom the following list may be taken as a basis for further study :

| | Born. | Died. | Remarks. |
|----------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sir Thomas Wyatt Earl of Surrey . . | 1503 1517? | 1542 1547 | Petrarchist. Tottel's Miscellany. Love-poems and translations. Tottel's Miscellany. |
| Thomas, Lord Vaux Thomas Tusser . . | 1520 1527 | 1596 1580 | In <i>Paradise of Dainty Devices</i> . <i>Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry</i> : of antiquarian interest. |
| George Gascoigne . | 1525? | 1577 | Moralist; blank verse. <i>The Steele Glass</i> . |
| George Turberville | 1540? | 1610? | Occasional verse and translations. Smooth metre. |
| Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst | 1536 | 1608 | Chief author of <i>The Mirror for Magistrates</i> , compiled by William Baldwin. Moral lessons to princes. Chaucerian in style; useful to Shakespeare. Playwright; <i>Gorboduc</i> . |
| Samuel Daniel . . | 1562 | 1619 | <i>History of the Civil Wars</i> , narrative and meditative poem in 8 books. <i>Delta</i> , sonnet-sequence. |

| | Born. | Died. | Remarks. |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Michael Drayton . | 1563 | 1631 | Voluminous versifier. <i>Polyolbion</i> (itinerary of England and Wales). <i>The Barons' Wars</i> ; <i>England's Heroical Epistles</i> , etc. And sonnet-sequences*. |
| Sir John Davies . | 1569? | 1626 | Good smooth verse. <i>Nosce Te Ipsum</i> (poem on metaphysical reason). Acrostics on Elizabeth; pamphlet on Irish Discontents. |
| John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's | 1573 | 1631 | Reformed rake. Satires, epistles, love-poems, etc. Mostly harsh and obscure. |
| Joseph Hall, Bishop of Norwich | 1574 | 1656 | Satires in verse; in imitation of Persius. |
| Richard Edwards . | 1523? | 1566 | <i>The Paradise of Dainty Devices</i> . |
| Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford | 1550 | 1604 | Court-poet; head of clique opposed to Leicester and Sidney. |
| Thomas Lodge . | 1558? | 1625 | Contributor to <i>England's Helicon</i> . Wrote in prose <i>Rosalynde, or Euphuus' Golden Legacy</i> , whence Shakespeare took plot of <i>As You Like It</i> ; and a drama, <i>The Wounds of Civil War</i> . |
| Sir Edward Dyer | — | 1607 | Contributor to the <i>Poetical Rhapsody</i> ; lyric poet; 'My mind to me my kingdom is'. |
| Henry Constable . | 1562 | 1613 | Sonneteer*. |
| Barnabe Barnes . | 1569? | 1609 | Disciple of Gabriel Harvey. Sonneteer*. |
| Arthur Golding . | 1536? | 1605? | Translator of Ovid's <i>Metamorphoses</i> (used by Shakespeare). |
| Sir John Harington | 1561 | 1612 | Epigrammatist. First translator of Ariosto's <i>Orlando Furioso</i> . |
| Richard Carew . | 1555 | 1620 | Antiquary. Translator of Tasso. |
| William Drummond of Hawthornden . | 1585 | 1649 | Sonneteer*. Wrote <i>A Cypress Grove</i> , a prose meditation on death. |
| Sir Thomas Hoby . | 1530 | 1566 | Translated Castiglione's <i>The Courtier</i> ('the mirror of Italian society during the Renaissance'), a work of great influence on the manners and conduct of Elizabeth's Court. |
| Arthur Broke . . | — | 1563 | Translated Bandello's <i>Tragical History of Romeo and Juliet</i> . Other translations from Bandello, Boccaccio, and other storehouses of fiction followed from various writers. |
| Sir Thomas North | 1535? | 1601? | Translated Plutarch's <i>Lives</i> , and other classical works, into good, vigorous English. |
| John Florio . . | 1553? | 1625 | Translated Montaigne splendidly. Euphuist. |
| John Selden . . | 1584 | 1654 | <i>Table Talk</i> . Jurist. |

* See Lee's *Life of Shakespeare* for a more complete account of the sonnet-eering vogue.

N.B. The works of Donne, Hall, Carew and Drummond are included in *The Muses' Library* (Routledge); Golding's *Ovid* has been reprinted by the De La More Press.

The above list, though perhaps too long to be directly useful, is yet quite incomplete. 'Elizabethan literature', a term employed to describe an era extending backwards through the Tudors and forwards to the Jacobean age, is an almost inexhaustible reservoir. The most that can be done is to suggest some clues to guide the student's independent reading. But even this list of 'minor writers' would fail to achieve its purpose, if no mention were made of the industry of the PAMPHLET-TEERS. It was an age, as we know, of religious and literary controversy; the quarrel—almost a duel—between Sir Philip Sidney and the Earl of Oxford, referred to above, is an instance in point. Gabriel Harvey's Areopagus had to meet several onslaughts in this kind, nor was the conceited character of the founder of that clique likely to deter attack. The dramatists to whom we shall come were prominent in that direction, and Thomas Nash (1567-1601), though a playwright by profession, is chiefly remembered by his *Have with you to Saffron Walden*, in which otherwise inoffensive town Harvey's father had been a rope-maker. Robert Greene, in his *Groat's Worth of Wit* compounded for his profligacy by a semi-religious outpouring of repentance, and Thomas Dekker, another dramatist, adds to our knowledge of the times by his *Gull's Horn-Book* and *Seven Deadly Sins of London* *. Finally, there was the Martin Marprelate controversy, which rained a deluge of pamphlets, scurrilous and personal in the extreme, on the topics which engaged the illustrious talents of Richard Hooker (1554 ?-1600) in his *Treatise on*

* Both recently reprinted by the De La More Press.

the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, shortly known as the *Ecclesiastical Polity*, a great monument of English prose, erudite, vigorous, and well-proportioned, the object of which was to establish the rights and duties of the Anglican church against corruption by Rome and corrosion by Calvin, and the effect of which was to create a permanent defence of law, right, and obedience, political and religious alike.

Thus, there is abundant evidence for the 'exuberance' of the times which produced Burghley in affairs, Raleigh in adventure, Sidney in romance, Bacon in philosophy, Shakespeare in drama. It would be gratifying to the present writer, and instructive for his readers, if he could illustrate the views expressed in the present chapter by citation and examples; if, for instance, he could trace by a series of specimens of English prose the literary succession from Lyly to Macaulay. But these illustrations must be sought elsewhere; best of all, in unabridged editions of the authors under review. For all summaries and generalizations, all theories and views of literature, are based ultimately on the written books, and on the books as they were written. They stand or fall by this evidence, from which there is no appeal, and which, when sought independently, is always more valuable and interesting than any epitome, summary, or extracts. The most that can be done, the most that has been aimed at in this chapter, is to fix the landmarks, as it were; to plant a few signposts in a region the diverse ways of which are else apt to prove bewildering. This, after all, is the right method of learning how to

read English literature—not to abridge each writer to an extract, but to see him in the surroundings of his own times, to know his environment and circumstances, and thus to discover his 'knowledge-value', as Herbert Spencer, the philosopher (1820-1903), taught us to call it, the true value of his contribution to the art which he cultivated. In this way alone may an exuberant age be compressed into a pillule of criticism; and if this method has succeeded, it should now be possible to pass to the first of the three greatest names which adorn Elizabethan literature—the name of the 'poets' poet', the sweet and gorgeous Edmund Spenser.

What do we expect from a poet who was bred in the Sidney tradition, yet surpassed his master in strenuousness?; who learned the language of the Euphuists—the new love-lore of the Court—yet escaped its empty formalism?; who was befriended by Gabriel Harvey, but did not stand still on the Areopagus?; who was, in a word, a chief glory of that wonderful decade in English literature—the 'nineties of the sixteenth century? What do we expect but the *Faerie Queen*?, the poem of allegorical romance, in which all elements of thought bequeathed to England by her past, or borrowed by her from her neighbours, were gathered into one treasure-house, transfused by one man's imagination, and minted into nine-line stanzas which wind their way through the poem like the reaches of a river in its own fairyland?

The details of Spenser's life need not detain us here. He was born in 1552 of middle-class origin. He made good friends at Cambridge, and was

introduced by Gabriel Harvey to his friend Sir Philip Sidney, and thus to Leicester's service and public affairs. He served as secretary to the Irish Viceroy, and subsequently as Sheriff of Cork, paying a long visit to England about the year 1590. In October, 1598, his Irish home, Kilcolman Castle, was sacked and burned by rebels, and one of his children is said to have perished in the flames. His health and his career both suffered, so much so, Ben Jonson tells us, that when he died in January, 1599, at a house in King Street, Westminster, he was actually in want of bread. For the rest; he was a humanist in philosophy as well as a Puritan in religion; as diligent a reader of Plato as of Ariosto; a lover, a husband, and a father, as well as the author of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, the *Faerie Queen*, and minor pieces.

We do not propose to attempt a criticism of the *Faerie Queen*, the most memorable, as it is the longest, of Edmund Spenser's works. The critics dispute whether he was preacher or painter; whether, with Milton and Ruskin, we are to put his moral purpose first, or, with Hume and Lowell, we are to use him as 'a gallery of pictures'. The wisest course is to read what he wrote; not merely what he wrote in his Preface at Raleigh's command, 'expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke', and alleging that 'the generall end of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and quiete discipline', for which end he 'chose the history of King Arthure, as most fitte for the excellency of his person', as Homer chose Agamemnon and Ulysses, Virgil Aeneas, Ariosto Orlando, and Tasso

Rinaldo and Godfredo; explaining the purpose of the 'first twelve books' * to be the portrayal in Arthur, before he was king, of the 'image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morale vertues, as Aristotle hath devised; . . . which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged to frame the other part of polliticke vertues in his person, after that he came to bee king'; and stating the design of the *Faerie Queen* as 'glory in my general intention, but in my particular . . . the most excellent and glorious person of our souveraine the Queene and her Kingdome in Faery land',—not merely this letter to Raleigh should be read, with its prayer for the continuance of the noble knight's 'honorable favour', but rather the poem itself. For the letter is humble and hesitating in tone, and belongs to Spenser's biography, in which it is seen as the half-serious apology of the poet, employed officially in Ireland, to the great statesman and sailor with the ear of Elizabeth at Court. It must be read in connection with his verses entitled *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*, in which Spenser described his experiences during his visit to England and the Queen between 1589 and 1591, and which he dedicated to Sir Walter Raleigh, to whose influence he owed the journey. That 'simple pastorall' is full of interest and information as to the literary side of Elizabeth's Court, and its allusions may readily be followed if the following identities are kept in mind: Cynthia, 'great shepherdess' and 'Lady of the Sea',

* Only six books and a fragment were completed, though further parts *may* have been destroyed by the fire at Kilcolman.

is, of course, the Queen; Colin Clout is Spenser himself; the 'new shepherd late upsprung' is Samuel Daniel; Amyntas, 'noblest swain that ever piped in an oaten quill', is Thomas Watson; Alcon, Sir Thomas Lodge; Hobbinol is Gabriel Harvey; the 'Shepherd of the Ocean' is Raleigh; Aetion, 'whose Muse full of high thought's invention, doth like himself heroically sound', has been claimed as Shakespeare; Astrofell is Sir Philip Sidney, and so forth, and so forth, through all the resources and devices of this allegorical style.

To return from Raleigh, the patron, to Spenser, the poet: The design, as expounded in the Preface, is almost irrelevant to the poem. Prince Arthur plays a minor part in the third and fourth books; the fifth book discusses justice, which is hardly a 'private' virtue at all, and the sixth book, dealing with Courtesy, is occupied with Raleigh allegorized rather than with the nominal hero. These things matter very little, when the patron's commands are dismissed, nor is it very important to remember that the subjects of the six existing books are the adventures, respectively, of Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, Courtesy. More useful, perhaps to the student of comparative letters is the knowledge of Spenser's imitation of the methods and manner of the *Orlando Furioso* of Ariosto of Ferrara (1474-1533), the great Italian poet. Spenser hoped, as he himself said, to 'overgo' Ariosto, but he forgot that, in choosing Prince Arthur as a like type to Ariosto's Charlemagne, he was writing in an age and in a mood very considerably remote from those of the poet of Ferrara, who was Machiavelli's contemporary.

Briefly, Ariosto succeeded in his design because his moral purpose was subordinate to his love of beauty and to his acquiescence in the social and political conditions of an Italian city in the late Middle Ages ; Spenser failed to adapt Ariosto's scheme to the *Faerie Queen* because his imagination soared above the limits of his characters, and he left these vaguely defined and imperfectly realized in order to reach, through the harmonies of his style and the craft of its elaborate mechanism, those truths of conduct which Shakespeare vitalized in his plays and Hooker codified in his treatise. And more than the claim to unity of purpose through the allegory of Arthur, as laid down in the letter to Raleigh, more than the adaptation to that allegory of the style and devices of Ariosto, more than the conflict between the Churches of England and Rome as imaged by Una and Duessa, more than the episodical exaltation of Elizabeth as Gloriana, and other contemporary allusions, more than any external criticism whatever, is the evidence of the poem to its own beauty. This 'Rubens of English poetry', as he has been called, is, after all, his best witness, and the student should be seized, first of all, by the charms which Spenser presents to his ears and his eyes before he analyses the strands of the gorgeous and fantastic pattern woven by the magic of the poet's pen into the *Faerie Queen*. That mood of spiritual uplifting which elevates the old moralizing about personified virtues and the seven deadly sins ; that strenuous hate of evil which ennobles while it emboldens the passages delineating vice ; that idealizing passion which abstracts the accidents of time from

the actions of men, leaving them less human, it may be, but more like the image of their Maker ; that steady glow of woman-worship, in which the light of Italy's Madonnas is reflected through the mirror of Elizabethan Court-sentiment ; that insatiate sense of beauty in form, which penetrates the music, and illuminates the narrative, and permeates the void between the physical and the moral poles,—if the student discover these things for himself, he will have little to learn from the critics. Take from the First Book the characterization and adventures of Una and the Knight ; take from the Second the poet's conception of the dwelling-place of Honour ; take (with a jump) from the Seventh—the unfinished—Book his description of the ambitions of Mutability ; take from a hundred places isolated examples of his gifts of imagination and fancy, in simile, metaphor and word-painting ; remember his profound scholarship, and his leisure to display it ; consider the resources of his metre, the very restrictions of which compelled its master and inventor to experiments in variation *, and some provision will have been made for the equipment of Spenser's readers.

We have now followed the literature of Elizabeth's age through one phase of its activity. We have seen the patrons and practitioners of letters at her Court. We have seen Raleigh come home from his expeditions and adventures to receive the dedications of books, and to write books of his own. We have seen the booksellers' miscellanies, in

* The metre has since been employed in poems by Burns, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, and others.

which, as in the magazine of to-day, opportunity was afforded for the circulation of 'occasional' work. We have seen the wits of the Court cast about for a suitable style in which to pour forth the praises of Elizabeth, and to wile away the tedium of Court-life by elaborate exercises in the art of eloquent love-making, and we have seen their ready adoption of Lyly's Euphuism as the medium. We have seen Sir Philip Sidney chafing at the commands of his Royal Mistress, and seeking in romantic storytelling the romance missing from his fortunes, and we have seen how the *Arcadia* suffused the egotism of its inception with an ideal of knightly conduct. We have noted the crowd of poetasters, sonneteers, and lampoonists who thronged the Court and its cliques; and, lastly, we have learned to recognize in the work of Edmund Spenser the crown and consummation of all their efforts and experiments. His is the second great name in the history of English poetry, as Chaucer's is the first; he works into the texture of his poem all the hopes and aspirations of his audience and age, all the legacy of learning of past times.

Spenser's death is a convenient point at which to date the close of this period. Even when 'Colin Clout' came 'home again' in or about 1590, the Court was passing into a new phase, owing to two very simple causes. The first was the victory over Spain, which fixed the direction of politics, and, partially, of conduct; the second was the Queen's increasing years. The 'Gloriana' and 'Cynthia' period in Elizabethan annals was passing away. The Queen in her old age, with her chief counsellors dead or disaffected, did not hold the imagination as

intensely as before, and men's thoughts turned perforce from the personal aspects of her reign to the problems of government and conduct which she had symbolized. A sign of this change is the appearance of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, but before we examine this work and the greater prose-works of Bacon, we must turn back from the Court to the stage. We must follow the outburst of Elizabethan literature through its other phase of activity, which had its centre at the Mermaid Tavern, and of which we have so far only heard the occasional gibes at Gabriel Harvey and his friends on the part of the playwrights and pamphleteers.

CHAPTER VI

SHAKESPEARE

Souls of Poets dead and gone
What Elysium have ye known—
Happy field or mossy cavern—
Choicer than the *Mermaid Tavern*?

KEATS.

ONE name stands at the head of this chapter, and one reputation overshadows the fame of the many writers in the roll of the Elizabethan drama. The Mermaid Tavern was in Bread Street, in the City of London, and there the choicest spirits of the stage would gather for business and jest. In a little-known play, produced at Hamburg in 1884, Ernst von Wildenbruch, a German playwright, whom the reigning Emperor has encouraged but who has not much public following, attempted to represent dramatically the rise of Shakespeare's star and the eclipse of the elder playwrights. Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) gives his name to Wildenbruch's play, and is the hero of it, and the final scenes are laid in the green-room of the Royal Theatre at Queen Elizabeth's palace in London on the first night of *Romeo and Juliet*. It is an inspiring subject for a modern dramatist to choose—the production of Shakespeare's early masterpiece nearly three centuries before, and Wilden-

bruch assumes that the frequenters of the green-room, who included Ben Jonson, Robert Greene, Peele, Lodge, Thomas Nash, Henslow, and the Queen's stage-manager, are unaware who wrote it. The question of authorship is eagerly discussed, and general opinion ascribes it to Christopher Marlowe, the leader in age and reputation of the brilliant little coterie. But presently the secret leaks out that a certain Will Shakespeare, a comparatively humble actor and versifier, a kind of 'handy man' of stage life, is the genuine author. A pretty piece of malice is then devised against Marlowe, who has aroused many jealousies, and who is represented as overbearing and unpopular. He shall be compelled to pronounce his own decree of abdication in favour of the obscure and younger man. And, to add to his humiliation, Lord Hunsdon, Elizabeth's chamberlain, shall be referred to Marlowe as the man to whom honour is due, when her Majesty sends for the fortunate author of the play.

A love-interest complicates this green-room plot. The story of Romeo and Juliet coincides in certain features with Marlowe's own love-story with Leonora, daughter of Sir Thomas Walsingham, and Marlowe—chafing at the praises bestowed on a new man's play—discovers Leonora reading the manuscript of *Romeo and Juliet*, and weaving its music into the memories of her own romance:

MARLOWE. Thanks due to me? whose thanks, and
thanks wherefore?

LEONORA. What for? what for? O, thanks for Juliet's
guile,

And thanks for Romeo whom Juliet lov'd!
Have we not sinn'd the sweet sin of Verona,
Behind my father's back did we not too

Conspire of love? And has not Marlowe's name
Become, like Romeo to Juliet,
The world, and all its law, to Leonora?
I thank thee, great one, for thy greatest work.

But it was not his work, and when the pompous old chamberlain accosts him in the Queen's name, and renews the unearned congratulations, Nash and the rest of them are gratified by a fine display of Christopher Marlowe's hot temper. Wildenbruch's tragedy ends on a characteristically German note of sentiment and false heroics. Marlowe is stabbed at the Mermaid Tavern—this fact is genuine—and Shakespeare enters in a mood of reconciliation and magnanimity to take leave of the elder poet. Marlowe points to his victorious rival, and exclaims

Here, Leonora, here, this is the image,
The perfect poet, whom your soul conceived;
So great, so gentle, no contempt or laughter,
Nor any triumph that a rival fail'd—
O God, my God, I give Thee thanks—I love him.

And Shakespeare plagiarizes himself, and quotes a line from *Hamlet*, on which the curtain falls:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown.

This picture of theatrical life at the dawn of Shakespeare's career is painted in somewhat crude colours. Marlowe was probably not as big nor Shakespeare as small as he is drawn for the sake of the dramatic contrast. But Wildenbruch's play forms an interesting study of what is really a drama of dramatists, as enacted more than three centuries ago, when Shakespeare emerged from the rank of play-actors and adapters who ran in and out of the Mermaid Tavern, and rose by deliberate self-culture and self-help to be the supreme

playwright of his age, the chief glory of English letters, and the world's great master of dramatic art.

There is contemporary evidence to the fascination of the Mermaid. Francis Beaumont (1584-1616), writing to Ben Jonson (c.1573-1637), exclaims :

What things have we seen
Done at the Mermaid? heard words that have been
So nimble, and so full of subtle flame.
As if that every one from whence they came
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest.

Fuller, writing in 1662, relates : ' Many were the wit-combats between him [Shakespeare] and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war ; Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning, solid but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit and invention '. If the Court took its amusement in ' Arcadian ' and ' Euphuizing ' ways, the wits in the green-room behind the stage had likewise the opportunity of ' sharpening their tongues ', in these days when England from Land's End to John o' Groats was alive with the energy of action.

It may be asked at this point : In what did Shakespeare's specific greatness consist ? ; and, indeed, it is worth while to avoid in this study the epithets of superlative praise in which answers to that question are commonly disguised, and to try to discover the nature of Shakespeare's contribu-

tion to the heritage of English letters. There must be something tangible, something which criticism may take hold of and say, 'This is England's dramatic poet, this is indeed William Shakespeare', even though the critic be a mere student inquiring how to read English literature. Shakespeare's greatness should encourage us, not dismay us, in this quest. The very consensus of opinion which ranks Shakespeare so high should help us to discern the greatness for ourselves, to realize it at first-hand, and to sift the accumulated deposit of praise till we find the true gold underneath. When Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) declares of Shakespeare

Others abide our question. Thou art free.
We ask and ask—Thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge. . . .
All pains the immortal spirit must endure,
All weakness which impairs, all griefs which bow,
Find their sole speech in that victorious brow,

when Algernon Charles Swinburne (b.1837) writes of him :

Not if men's tongues and angels' all in one
Spake, might the word be said that might speak Thee.
All joy, all glory, all sorrow, all strength, all mirth,
Are his : without him, day were night on earth,

when we know that the praises of these two poets of the nineteenth century are but an echo of the voice with which Shakespeare has been praised by men and women of all periods and all countries, with rare exceptions in place and time,—we feel, and feel rightly, that before we read the praise, which is

itself an exercise in the appreciation of good letters, we must first realize the justice of it, and discover what Sir John Seeley (1819-1894) called the 'moral underlying the flourishes of rhetoric'. 'The idol is the measure of the worshipper', once wrote James Russell Lowell, the distinguished American critic. It is for us to test this Shakespeare-worship by trying to measure its idol. What is, then, the Shakespeare-idol, and wherein does his greatness consist? Can we fix, however imperfectly, some central principles which moved him, and which made him the man he was, some main-springs of his action, explaining what his performances reveal?

Let us take one or two threads and use them, if we can, as clues to the pattern of the design. There was Edmund Spenser's 'whole intention' in sketching the *Faerie Queen*, as propounded to Raleigh in the preface to his poems. 'The general end of all the book', as we saw in the last chapter, was 'to fashion a gentleman, or noble person, in virtuous and quiet discipline.'

'To fashion a gentleman', let us hold this thread for a moment, and take another in our hand. Just now we quoted a German playwright for the sake of his vivid presentment of the Mermaid Tavern coterie. The Germans are ardent Shakespeare-worshippers, and we may quote at this point an illuminating passage from the work of a German critic, Dr. Eduard Vehse: 'Shakespeare', he writes, 'was the first to rest his compositions on a purely human basis. . . . Shakespeare, the untaught and unlearned poet, was the first who displayed energetically the modern spirit of

worldly knowledge, which is the direct converse of the spirit of the Middle Ages'.

Spenser's aim was 'to fashion a gentleman', despite the fanciful setting in which his genius worked. Shakespeare's writings rested on 'a purely human basis'; his 'spirit of worldly knowledge' was directly opposed to the spirit of mediævalism.

These are two clues to hold fast, and a third may be supplied from the next chapter in this book, in which we shall see that Francis Bacon, Shakespeare's greatest contemporary, directed his methods of philosophy to a practical end. We have already noted (p. 65) that he sought to lay the foundation 'not of any sect or doctrine, but of human utility and power'. Here we may add two sentences from the same *Preface to the Great Instauration*. 'I have not sought nor do I seek either to force or ensnare men's judgments, but I lead them to things themselves and the concordances of things, that they may see for themselves what they have, what they can dispute, what they can add, and contribute to the common stock. . . . And by these means I suppose that I have established for ever a true and lawful marriage between the empirical and rational faculty, the unkind and ill-starred divorce and separation of which has thrown into confusion all the affairs of the human family'. Here once more we are confronted with the opposition to the mediæval spirit. Bacon, unlike the theologians, will not ensnare men's judgments, but will lead them to see for themselves, and to escape for ever from the tyranny of ecclesiastical authority. He appealed from that hampering

tradition to nature and to 'things themselves', through the knowledge of which men were to 'add to the common stock', and to increase the resources of material happiness.

Spenser aimed at fashioning a gentleman; Shakespeare's interests were rooted in humanity; Bacon's philosophy had a practical object, directed to human welfare.

These clues should help us to a conclusion, but yet another may be found in the ascertained facts of Shakespeare's biography. Shakespeare, who wrote of Love that

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
Sonnet cxvi;

who declared that

To shun the heaven that leads ^{none knows well} men to this hell.
Sonnet cxxix;

Shakespeare, whose imagination rose to the height of the most splendid ambition, who created Falstaff, Hamlet, Macbeth, Juliet, Desdemona, was the same William Shakespeare who in the evening of his days (1611-1616) retired to Stratford-on-Avon, where he was born in 1564, and there settled at New Place to enjoy the fruits of ease. To some minds of rare refinement it has appeared incongruous and disillusioning that the Shakespeare of the plays and sonnets should have been the 'William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon, in the Countie of Warwick, gentleman', who procured a coat-of-arms, signed mortgages and leases,

invested his money in real estate, fought the lord of the manor to protect the value of his tithes, and entailed his property on his elder daughter to the exclusion of his wife. These are the facts, however, and a keener insight will discern their strict congruity with the man and with his age.

Let us rehearse our threads once more. Bacon sought human utility ; Spenser aimed at fashioning a gentleman, and Shakespeare who ' rested his compositions on a purely human basis ', was thoroughly competent to manage his own affairs with prudence. Do not these considerations provide us with the key to Shakespeare's greatness, and was not he who ' out-topped knowledge ', and without whom ' night were day ', great because of his humanity ? ; because he first and chiefly reflected the strivings of his age—an age of geographical expansion and political self-consciousness, of wide intellectual liberation, of keen individualism displayed in the heroic endurance of physical peril and discomfort for the sake of enlarging the frontiers of knowledge, or for the sake of mere adventure and experience and for the right of calling oneself a man ; of feeling, at midnight under the stars, on a strange sea bounded by new shores, the sense of imperious manhood surging to generous self-expression ? This at least explains the puzzle of the superfine ' idealists ', who affect to discover a discrepancy between Shakespeare's life and his art, between the youth who migrated from Stratford to London to seek his fortune with the players, who was ' Jack-of-all-trades ' in the theatre, patching—in purple—other people's plays, taking any vacant part, writing his own plays at odd moments,

and the middle-aged man who returned from London to Stratford in order to enjoy a busy leisure in the midlands which he loved, his work done and his fortune made and the weaker vessels outdistanced. It is the sign of a strong man's nature not to make ends of his means, not to lose sight of the object which he seeks in treading the roads to its attainment. Shakespeare's countrymen, who know so little of the facts of his biography, may be pardoned if they like to dwell on the one incontestable fact of the poet's migration and return. It is not merely for the sentiment which tugged him homewards to Stratford; it is rather for the evidence which that sentiment affords to Shakespeare's purpose and judgment, to his sanity of vision, and his undeviating sense of the value of life as an Englishman in the age of Elizabeth. Not Sidney's Arcadian remoteness, nor Lyly's Euphuizing strains, nor the good-fellowship at the Mermaid, nor the glamour of the Court and stage, could wean this Warwickshire lad from his practical aim of realizing life's fullest possibilities in the station to which he belonged. His experiences served him as means to this end: he, too, had been romantic, euphuistic, a boon-companion, a player before the Queen; but he preserved through all his experiences a sound centripetal tendency to the sphere which suited him best, and the Englishman's sturdy commonsense of his own worth as a unit in society.

Shakespeare was practical, Bacon was practical, even Spenser had a practical aim, and they lived in a practical age. This is the clue which we sought for

the apprehension of Shakespeare's greatness. He used the drama as a vehicle for the expression of the individual consciousness. His plays were character plays, and his characters, properly considered, had to work out their own redemption, unassisted by the State and undistracted by the Church. We must seize and hold this general idea, that beyond all the excesses of conduct and taste which marked the England of Elizabeth—its horse-play, its exuberance, its dirt, its cruelty,—there were these steps to moral and political freedom by which men climbed to a superior vantage-ground. For here, once for all, is the secret of the progress of literature and the arts. Culture does not advance on lines of arithmetical progression. Shakespeare is not necessarily greater than the writers of the Middle Ages because he is later in time. The difference lies in the greater opportunities which the later times offered to his pen. By virtue of the heightened ideals and widened prospects of his age, limited though it was, he expressed truths inconceivable by the yet more limited intelligence of former generations. Bacon's truths of natural science, Spenser's truths of spiritual perfection, and the dramatist's truths of human capacity, were wrested alike from the spirit of the age, winging its way through regions of light which had been closed hitherto. Shakespeare surveyed mankind, not—as Chaucer—from London to Canterbury, but from sea-board to sea-board in physical geography, and through an infinite range of the emotions of mind and soul—of ethology and psychology. From the stern rigours of the North to the soft languors of the South he ranged with confidence and freedom ;

his genius was equally at home in Elsinore and Verona. The 'nipping and eager air' in the midnight of Hamlet's apparition, which might have lured him

to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea

Hamlet, I. iv,

is matched by the midnight in Capulet's orchard, where

silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues
Like softest music to attending ears.

Romeo and Juliet, II, ii.

From the 'missing link' in the chain of human evolution, the formless monster of the Caribbean sea, to the choicest product of a luxuriant civilization, Shakespeare ranged with like certainty of touch. What greater contrast could there be than this between Caliban and Cleopatra, between the untutored savage on the new-discovered island, wrought from the tales brought home by mariners scarce crediting all they saw, and the Queen of Egypt in her glory, surpassing the most splendid shows of Elizabeth's pageant-loving Court? Yet Shakespeare is at home with both:

All the infections that the sun sucks up
From bogs, fens, flats, on Prospero fall, and make him . . .
By inch-meal a disease! His spirits hear me,
For every trifle are they set upon me;
Sometime like apes, they mow and chatter at me,
And after bite me; then like hedgehogs, which
Lie trembling in my barefoot way, and mount
Their pricks at my footfall; sometimes am I
All wound with adders who with cloven tongues
Do hiss me into madness.

The Tempest, II, ii.

Thus Caliban enters, from the darkness of his undeveloped nature, and now listen to Cleopatra at the height of her royal being :

Give me my robe, put on my crown ; I have
Immortal longing in me : now no more
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip :
Yare, yare, good Iras ; quick. Methinks I hear
Antony call ; I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act ; I hear him mock
The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men
To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come :
Now to that name my courage prove my title !
I am fire and air ; my other elements
I give to baser life. So ; have you done ?
Come then and take the last warmth of my lips.
Farewell, kind Charmian ; Iras, long farewell. . . .

Have I the aspic in my lips ? Dost fall ?
If thou and nature can so gently part,
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts, and is desired. Dost thou lie still ?
If thou vanishest, thou tell'st the world
It is not worth leave-taking.

Antony and Cleopatra, V, ii.

'Dramatic clairvoyance' is the phrase which one writer has coined to express this gift of the Elizabethans—this absorbing interest in all the affairs of humankind, combined with an instinctive power to represent the spectacle dramatically. For Shakespeare's England was bigger altogether than the England of Chaucer, and Englishmen in Shakespeare's day were compelled by the mere force of circumstances to realize possibilities of action and conduct unrevealed by the conditions of mediæval life. Restrictions and limitations were being removed ; barriers were being broken down ; opinion was free ; a man might carve his own fortune ; there were no venal indulgences, no

vicarious atonement; Bacon was shattering the 'idols'.

This intense humanity—the joy of life, and the sense of its being worth the living fully and consciously,—which ran like ichor through the Elizabethan blood, can be traced in a dozen directions. Take, for instance, the martyrology of the age. Listen to the utterances of Latimer and Cranmer at the stake: 'Play the man, Master Ridley!', cried the fine old hero of the Reformation, 'we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out'. And Cranmer, whose courage had failed him when the final sentence was pronounced, derived from the heat of the fires a moral glow which sustained him at the end. The church of St Mary at Oxford has few sermons written in its stone more eloquent than Cranmer's farewell:

Now I come to the great thing that troubleth my conscience more than any other thing that ever I said or did in my life, and that is the setting abroad of writings contrary to the truth; which here I now renounce and refuse as things written by my hand contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart, and written for fear of death to save my life, if it might be. And, forasmuch as my hand offended in writing contrary to my heart, my hand therefore shall be the first punished; for if I come to the fire, it shall be the first burned.

Or take the evidence of Hakluyt, and the heroic temper of the sea-captains of the age, who whether men of common names—a Captain Smith or a Captain Davis—or men of higher descent, like the great Sir Walter Raleigh, exhibited the same fine purpose, the same practical enterprise, the same fortitude in danger, and the same Elizabethan sense of

life being well worth the living in its fullest power and capacity. Take, lastly, the evidence of men's attitude towards women in the reign of the 'Virgin Queen',—with her contrarities and fascination, her swift wrath and generous forgiveness,—and contrast it with the sublimated virtues which dominated mediæval thought. The abstractions have given way to flesh-and-blood; the asceticism has yielded to enjoyment; instead of imagined Madonnas or their living prototypes idealized beyond the limits of earthly recognition, instead of Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura, we have the wives and mothers and daughters of Shakespearean drama,—warm, living, loving, with human tears and laughter, participating from the highest to the lowest, from Dame Quickly to 'Egypt' enthroned, in the tragedy and comedy of actual life.

This is the spirit of the age, which Shakespeare mirrored in his plays. The sole problem which occupied him was the problem of men's conduct in the affairs of life. The subject of all his plays, and his own position towards that subject, is contained in Hamlet's apostrophe to Rosen-crantz :

What a piece of work is a man ! how noble in reason !
how infinite in faculty ! in form and moving how express
and admirable ! in action how like an angel ! in apprehension
how like a god ! the beauty of the world ! the
paragon of animals !

Hamlet, II. ii.

Men ask for Shakespeare's philosophy of life. They have it here. They ask what religion he professed, what code of morals he practised, how

he was equipped for his task. The answer is here. To this 'piece of work' he addressed himself with the genius derived from his age, to the 'noble reason' of man, whether undeveloped like Caliban's, or destroyed like Lear's, or 'turned awry' like Hamlet's, or misdirected like Iago's, or outgrown like Macbeth's; to his infinitude of faculty, his capacity for angels' action, his godlike apprehension, his power for beauty in the world.

We go back to the Mermaid Tavern. England was ripe for drama when Shakespeare, at the age of twenty-two, arrived from Stratford in London to seek the fortune to which, in the phrase of Bacon, his contemporary, he had already 'given hostages'*. Vagrant companies of players had been touring the country for years with a repertoire of stock pieces, ready for recital in the halls of the barons and nobles, or in the market-places of larger towns. Briefly, these pieces represented chiefly allegorical characters, personified from abstract qualities, including the conventional Vice, whose part degenerated at times into a harlequinade. In London there was more than one theatre at this date, with a troupe of actors attached to it, and several such troupes derived their license or their pay from wealthy patrons of the stage, and would consequently be described as the Queen's Servants, or Lord Leicester's Servants, or otherwise, as the case might be. But more and more, in the years immediately

* 'He that hath *wife* and *children*, hath given Hostages to fortune'. Bacon, *Essays*; of *Marriage and Single Life*. Shakespeare married Ann Hathaway in 1582, and had two daughters and a son (Susanna, Judith, and Hamnet) before the end of 1585.

preceding Shakespeare, they were earning the title which professional actors of to-day claim with the utmost pride—that of servants of the public. Especially Queen Elizabeth's natural taste for drama assisted the emergence of actors from the tap-room surroundings in which their origin was founded. Their recognition was opposed by the Puritan party, and by municipal authorities, who probably found that it was difficult to deal effectively with the hangers-on and loose characters whom the theatre tends to attract. Certainly, when the glory had departed from Elizabethan drama, these objections weighed heavily. But we are concerned at present with the period of Shakespeare's career, and the years which witnessed that splendour were years of growing popularity and increasing esteem for the stage.

We may borrow and annotate at this point a passage of glowing rhetoric, written more than twenty years ago by John Addington Symonds (1840-1893), a humanist of the nineteenth century, in whose feeble body there flamed with passionate vitality the fires of the Italian Renaissance :

What a future lay before this country lass—the bride-elect of Shakespeare's genius! For her there was preparing empire over the whole world of man :—over the height and breadth and depth of heaven and earth and hell ; over facts of nature and fables of romance ; over histories of nations and of households ; over heroes of past and present times, and airy beings of all poets' brains ! Hers were Greene's meadows, watered by an English stream. Hers, Heywood's moss-grown manor-houses, Peele's goddess-haunted lawns were hers, and hers the palace-bordered, paved ways of Verona. Hers was the darkness of the grave, the charnel-house of Webster. She walked the air-built loggie of Lyly's dreams, and paced the clouds of Jonson's Masques. She donned that ponderous

sock, and trod the measures of Volpone. She mouthed the mighty line of Marlowe. Chapman's massy periods and Marston's pointed sentences were hers by heart. She went abroad through primrose paths with Fletcher, and learned Shirley's lambent wit. She wandered amid dark dry places of the outcast soul with Ford. 'Hamlet' was hers. 'Antony and Cleopatra' was hers. And hers too was 'The Tempest'. Then, after many years, her children mated with famed poets in far distant lands. 'Faust' and 'Wallenstein', 'Lucrezia Borgia' and 'Marion Delorme', are hers.

Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama, (Smith, Elder, 1900). P. 210.

The student of English literature who masters the meaning of this passage—not merely its primary significance, but the secondary sense of its allusive and pictorial interpretations—will have gone a long way on the road to an intelligent apprehension of Elizabethan drama. The following comments may be added:

'*This country lass*' was the muse of English romantic drama, liberated from the canons of Aristotelian tradition. We saw at the beginning of Chapter V, how Sir Philip Sidney, writing a few years before the rise of Marlowe and Shakespeare, despaired of the future of drama unless it were based on Aristotle's precepts of an action confined to one day and a scene restricted to one place. These principles governed the great French playwrights of the seventeenth century, such as the Corneille brothers (Pierre, 1606-1684; Thomas, 1625-1708) Molière (1622-1673) and Racine (1639-1699). Sidney's school or clique—the 'Areopagus'—likewise drew a strict line of demarcation between tragedy and comedy, and the interminglement of parts, the 'comic relief' in Shakespeare's tragedies, was an offence to the purists. Lastly, we may

mention their preference for the Messenger's part in narrating actions, which, when the 'unities' had been broken through, could be represented dramatically. The 'country lass', who drew the best from tragedy and comedy alike, and who knew no rules save those arising out of her art, was the drama which Shakespeare perfected.

'For her there was preparing empire'. . . . We need only cite the subjects of Shakespeare's plays to supply instances of 'fables', 'histories', 'heroes', 'airy beings', and the rest.

'Greene's meadows, watered by an English stream'. Robert Greene (1560 ?-1592) was a man of wild and extravagant life, who fell a victim to the temptations which the novelties of travel and adventure offered to young men of his class in those undisciplined times. He was the son of a Norwich merchant, and received the usual education at Cambridge. On leaving the University he made a foreign tour, and then returned to mispend his days in the kind of theatrical Bohemia which had its headquarters at the Mermaid Tavern. He wore his strength out, and is chiefly remembered to-day for some Euphuistic novels, for his *Groatsworth of Wit*, and his *Repentance of Robert Greene*, two autobiographical tracts, inspired by remorse and by the need of money, and for his lyrical poems in which he may fitly be said to stray in 'meadows watered by an English stream'.

'Heywood's moss-grown manor-houses'. Thomas Heywood (d. about 1650) was born in Lincolnshire, and is alleged on his own authority to have patched or written more than two hundred plays. Among his original dramas are the two parts of

Edward IV, The Four Prentices of London, The Rape of Lucrece, The Golden Age, The Late Lancashire Witches, and A Woman Killed with Kindness. The last, a domestic drama, acted in 1603, is by far the best, and goes far to justify Charles Lamb's description of Heywood as 'a kind of *prose Shakespeare*'. His plots were almost always laid in England, and he was especially successful in representing the English country gentleman. Hence the 'moss-grown manor-houses' of our extract.

'*Peele's goddess-haunted lawns*'. George Peele, (1558 ?-1597 ?), wrote historical plays, but affected chiefly the kind of drama required for pageants and masques. His *Arraignement of Paris* and *Tale of Troy* dealt with classical subjects in a pastoral vein; his *David and Bethsabe* with scripture.

'*Verona*': *Romeo and Juliet*; *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

'*The charnel house of Webster*'. John Webster, (1580 ?-1628 ?), is chiefly known as the author of *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. The former is founded on an actual tragedy in Venice in the sixteenth century, and the latter on an Italian novelette. Webster's dramatic taste lay in the direction of violent death, and Symonds' descriptive phrase is borrowed from Webster himself, who makes the Duchess of Malfi say to her murderer,

Let me know fully therefore the effect
Of this thy dismal preparation,
This talk, fit for a charnel.

The tragic brevity of the line spoken by Ferdinand, her brother, when he enters after her strangulation,

Cover her face : mine eyes dazzle : she died young

shows that Webster's sombre genius was not unrestrained by a sense of artistic reticence.

'*Lyly's dreams*'. With John Lyly (1554 ?-1606) we return to the maker of *Euphues* and to the master of court comedy. Shakespeare's debt to this writer in the way of stylistic imitation and reminiscence has been noted in Chapter V. Here we add a general reminder as to Lyly's priority, in time, and to the examples shown by the elder playwright to the younger of the resources supplied to drama by prose-dialogue and humour, by the unconventional intercourse of various social classes, by the complications of love and sex, and by the introduction of supernatural machinery, such as witches, sprites, and so forth. One, at least, of Lyly's lyrics interspersed in his somewhat stilted dialogue, is worthy of Shakespeare at his best :

Now must I paint things vnpossible for mine arte, but agreeable with my affections : deepe and hollowe sighes, sadde and melancholye thoughtes, wounds and slaughters of conceites, a life posting to death, a death galloping from life, a wauering constancie, an vnsettled resolution, and what not, *Apelles* ? And what but *Apelles* ? But as they that are shaken with a feuer are to bee warmed with clothes, not groanes, & as he that melteth in a consumption is to bee recured by Colics, not conceites : so the feeding caker of my care, the neuer dying worm of my hart, is to be killed by counsell, not cries, by applying of remedies, not by replying of reasons. . . .

SONG BY APELLES.

Cupid and my *Campaspe* playd
At Cardes for kisses, *Cupid* payd ;
He stakes his Quiuer, Bow, & Arrows,
His Mothers doues, & teeme of sparrows ;

Looses them too; then, downe he throwes
 The corall of his lippe, the rose
 Growing on's cheek (but none knows how),
 With these, the cristall of his Brow,
 And then the dimple of his chinne:
 All these did my *Campaspe* winne.
 At last, hee set her both his eyes;
 Shee won, and *Cupid* blind did rise.
 O Loue! has shee done this to Thee?
 What shall (Alas!) become of mee?

Campaspe, III, v.*

How blithely rises the song from the arid soil of its origin!, and how refreshing is its simplicity after the elaborate wit of the preceding monologue! 'Jonson's . . . ponderous sock'. Ben Jonson (1573?-1637) was the author of *Every Man in his Humour*, in which Shakespeare acted at the Globe Theatre; of *Every Man out of his Humour*; of *Cynthia's Revels*, a satire on the 'wit' of the Court; of *The Poetaster, or his Arraignment*, a play in which the scene was laid in the times of Augustus Caesar, and in which Jonson, posing as Horace, attacked Dekker and other contemporaries. The reply was Dekker's *Satiromastix*, and this quarrel forms one of the episodes of the literary squabbles of the age, the interest of which is too remote from present taste to detain us in our search for enjoyment. Ben Jonson's *Volpone, or The Fox*, was played in 1605, and belongs to his so-called second period, the first comprising the satires on the Court, which brought him into trouble. The second group is likewise unpleasant, owing to the sordid surroundings in which the scenes are placed, and to the evil character of most of those who take part in them. It has been remarked

* From Dr. Bond's Edition.

that there is no virtue in *Volpone*, though it remains the leading example of satire on the English stage. Jonson stood alone in his age, and his immense erudition and brilliant wit, and, not least his tribute to the memory of Shakespeare, prove his title to greatness.

'*The mighty line of Marlowe*'. Christopher Marlowe's name and fame have already arrested our attention. Of him it may fairly be said that Shakespeare is well-nigh inconceivable without the attendant presence of that ill-starred genius of the stage, who wrote *Dr. Faustus*, *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II*, before he was killed in a brawl at the early age of nine-and-twenty. Marlowe first displayed the powers of blank verse as a metre for dramatic and narrative verse. He found it a succession of even lines of ten syllables apiece, each complete in itself, and—by the incidence of such endings—still requiring the familiar device of rhyme in couplets. He left it a paragraph of music, broken to the dramatist's design by variations in pause and accent, and freed for ever from the trammels of the false analogy of scansion by weak and strong syllables. English heroic verse is scanned by accent, not by quantity; and though Marlowe did not live long enough to evoke from this instrument all the harmonies of which it is capable, he showed the way which was followed by Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and, in the present generation, by Mr. Stephen Phillips, the metre of whose blank verse dramas goes straight back to Marlowe for its music. The 'grand style' in tragedy, to use Matthew Arnold's phrase, is

likewise Marlowe's contribution to the art which he adorned for so few years. The 'Marlowe touch' should be as famous and as recognizable in dramatic composition as the 'Nelson touch' in sea-tactics. The tiresomeness, the trivialities, the tentativeness disappear; and in the place of their multiform manifestations we have the concentrated action, the elevated diction, the noble directness of Marlowe. He may be turgid, colossal, exaggerative in his effects.

Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia!
What! can ye draw but twenty miles a day

may be as typical of his genius as the

Sometimes like women, or unwedded maids,
Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows
Than have the white breasts of the queen of love

of the vision of Faustus. But he was young and intemperate, and he lived in an exuberant age. None know the greatness that Marlowe would have been, were the pillar of his monument unbroken. 'The mighty line' and the mighty desire are both characteristic of this poet, whose magnificence Shakespeare includes but cannot eclipse.

Of Chapman, and Marston, and Fletcher, and Shirley, and Ford, and of Kyd, whom Symonds might have added, this study cannot speak; nor is it essential to the right apprehension of Shakespeare to trace in detail the influence of the English muse of romantic drama on Goethe and Schiller in Germany or on other later playwrights. The fame of Shakespeare looks before and after:

this is the fact to be remembered. His genius was his own, but its direction was determined by the spirit of his times, speaking through the tongues of Marlowe, Lyly, Jonson, Heywood, Webster, and the rest, and it inspired in its turn the great writers of succeeding ages to whom the torch was handed on.

And so we come at the last to William Shakespeare himself, with at least a partial consciousness of what we expect to find in him. We expect the Elizabethan spirit of a full and pulsing desire for light, its fearless approach to subjects shrouded hitherto in the mists of a State or of a Church monopoly. When it is no longer treason or sacrilege to claim self-government and self-control—freedom of the person and freedom of the conscience—Shakespeare's genius will irradiate the dark spaces of mediæval thought. We expect the Elizabethan 'alchemy', the power to extract hidden treasure from fable, history, and romance, to transmute the ore into clean-cut, glittering gems of dramatic presentation. We expect the intense human interest, the impassioned self-expression and invincible self-reliance of the men who extended the boundaries of the world, sailing beyond the magic pillars and discovering tangible gold ready for human hands to lift, and who pushed back the frontiers of science, revealing, behind the veil, not a garden of forbidden fruit, armed with the flaming terrors of excommunication and the stake, but a rugged country to explore, tempting the hardy seeker after truth to take his lantern and his staff, and to tap his difficult way to the springs of knowledge in the hills. We expect Marlowe's tragic touch, his vast and greatly-

conceived design, his broad inelaborate curves winding through the music of a metre hewn, as it were, from the rock. Shakespeare's sanity will guide the courageous back of the apprentice through the shoals where Marlowe suffered shipwreck to a safe and prosperous harbour. We expect the vigour of a man who met life with both hands open, in an age when the range of vision comprised a magnitude of spectacle inconceivable to modern eyes. For life was not parcelled in those days into minute subdivisions. The Court and the stage, the university and the sea, the town and the country met, in a sense more actual and more real than telephony and telegraphy construct. The very incertainties of life held a unifying spell. The favourite and statesman of to-day might be a prisoner in the Tower tomorrow; the unknown adventurer's cloak might serve Elizabeth for a carpet. Life is professionalized today, marked out into self-contained careers, with difficult social bridges. Then it was more picturesque, more diverse, more multi-coloured. The critics who express surprise at Shakespeare's universal knowledge—who made, for instance, his acquaintance with the law an argument for the Baconian heresy*—forget how small in his day was 'the world' as we call it, the collection, that is to say, of men of fashion and affairs to whom for a generation's space the keys of progress are confided. It was not true then, as now, that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives. Lastly, we

* There was a theory—chiefly in America—during the latter part of the nineteenth century that Francis Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays. It requires record, but has no kind of serious importance.

expect to find the breadth and depth of a poet who represented on the stage the good and evil of human nature. His writing is by no means flawless, though sometimes the effect of haste may be due to the outside cause of the conditions of publication *, and though, comparatively speaking, he is singularly free from the coarseness which marked his contemporaries. And his excellence is by no means uniform. It is a profitable exercise in the appreciation of style to trace, through the Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies, Shakespeare's emancipation from the props, crutches, and devices of his earlier method to the perfection of his powers, alike in expression and technique, in the full flower of his genius. Such a play, for instance, as *Love's Labour Lost*, which may be dated 1594, affords in certain particulars a striking contrast, e.g., with the tragedy of *King Lear*, produced in 1605. Ten years is but a brief time even in the life of a man, but the years of Shakespeare's growth sprang upwards on the wings of genius. Take a passage from the early comedy :

ROSALINE. Is the fool sick ?

BIRON. Sick at the heart.

ROS. Alack, let it bleed.

BIRON. Would that do it good ?

ROS. My physic says 'ay'.

BIRON. Will you prick't with your eye ?

ROS. No point, with my knife.

BIRON. Now, God save thy life !

ROS. And yours from long living !

BIRON. I cannot stay thanksgiving.

* Shakespeare had only to produce acting-versions of his plays ; it was rather against his interest than otherwise to publish them in book-form. Rival companies might have used them too freely. The 'First Folio' collection dates from 1623.

DUMAIN. Sir, I pray you, a word : what lady is that same ?

BOYET. The heir of Alencon, Katherine her name.

DUM. A gallant lady. Monsieur, fare you well.

LONGAVILLE. I beseech you a word : what is she in the white ?

BOYET. A woman sometimes, an you saw her in the light.

LONG. Perchance light in the light. I desire her name.

BOYET. She hath but one for herself, to desire that were a shame.

LONG. Pray you, sir, whose daughter ?

BOYET. Her mother's I have heard.

LONG. God's blessing on your beard !

BOYET. Good sir, be not offended.

She is an heir of Falconbridge.

LONG. Nay, my choler is ended.

She is a most sweet lady.

BOYET. Not unlike, sir, that may be.

BIRON. What's her name in the cap ?

BOYET. Rosaline, by good hap.

BIRON. Is she wedded or no ?

BOYET. To her will, sir, or so.

BIRON. You are welcome, sir : adieu.

BOYET. Farewell to me, sir, and welcome to you.

MARIA. That last is Biron the merry mad-cap lord : Not a word with him but a jest.

BOYET. And every jest but a word.

PRIN. It was well done of you to take him at his word.

BOYET. I was as willing to grapple as he was to board.

MAR. Two hot sheeps, marry.

BOYET. And wherefore not ships ? No sheep, sweet lamb, unless we feed on your lips.

MAR. You sheep, and I a pasture : shall that finish the jest ?

BOYET. So you grant pasture for me.

Love's Labour Lost, II, i. 183-222.

Note in this passage the jingle of rhymes, and the forced plays upon words, the puns and conceits, the coincidences of sense and verse, which, with explanatory speeches meant for the audience rather than for the players, are among the signs of the

pioneers in Elizabethan drama. And then consider a passage in *King Lear* :

FRANCE. Fairest Cordelia, thou art most rich being poor,
Most choice forsaken, and most loved despised,
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon :
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
Gods, gods ! 'tis strange that from their cold'st
neglect

My love should kindle to inflamed respect.
Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my
chance,

Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France :
Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy
Can buy this unprized precious maid of me,
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind :
Thou lovest here, a better where to find.

King Lear, I, i. 253-264.

Here, too, the verses are rhymed, but the tiresome assonance has disappeared, and the strength, we feel, has been applied to the matter rather than the manner. And when the passion grows fiercer, the style is enlarged with the subject, and we get such thoroughly Shakespearean writing as the following :

Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters :
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness ;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
You owe me no subscription : then let fall
Your horrible pleasure : here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man :
And yet I call you servile ministers,
That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head
So white and old as this.

King Lear, III, ii. 14-25.

Or take the rhetoric of *Richard II* (1593) and contrast the tragical pathos, the lyrical intensity, of that play with the magnificent orchestration of

Julius Caesar (circa 1601), with its alternating parts, its interaction of character upon character, and the unapproachable display of the power of one man's honesty against the allied forces of treachery and violence—Mark Antony against the world. Read the Third Act of each of these plays successively and somewhat of Shakespeare's greatness must penetrate the sense. Finally, trace the development of the problem which occupied him most—the effect of a call to action on a contemplative nature; the place of idealists in a world of realities; the rebellion against the tyranny of the fact; the quarrel between 'blood' and 'judgment',

New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul*.

Study in *As You Like It* the character of Jaques, in *Julius Caesar* the character of Brutus, in *Hamlet* the character of the prince himself, in *Romeo and Juliet* that of Romeo; study the lesson underlying the conception of Falstaff, and the sharp intrusion of the facts of life, contained in the King's rebuke, overthrowing, as by the bodkin-prick of death itself, the gigantic fabric of Falstaffian imposture:

I know thee not, old man; fall to thy prayers;
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester;

add to these studies a consideration of the character of Prospero in *The Tempest*, and something will be gathered of the humour, the generosity, the tenderness, the sternness, the passion, of the poet whose lips were touched to utter the humanity of his age.

* Tennyson: Dedication to the *Idylls of the King*.

SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

[NOTE : s = source; *Sh.* = Shakespeare; *b.* = between; *c.* = circa, about.]

| <i>Title.</i> | <i>Date of Composition.</i> | <i>Source, etc.</i> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Titus Andronicus . . . | <i>b.</i> 1584 and 1589 | <i>Sh.</i> part-author; <i>s.</i> unknown |
| Comedy of Errors . . . | 1589-91 . . . | <i>s.</i> Plautus (Rom. playwright). |
| Two Gentlemen of Verona . . . | <i>c.</i> 1590-92 . . . | <i>s.</i> Montemayor (Port. novelist) |
| King Henry VI (pts. 1, 2, 3) . . . | 1591-2 . . . | <i>s.</i> Holinshed; <i>Sh.</i> part-author. |
| Venus and Adonis . . . | 1593 . . . | <i>s.</i> Ovid, <i>Met.</i> x. |
| Midsummer Night's Dream . . . | <i>c.</i> 1593-95 . . . | <i>s.</i> Chaucer, <i>Knight's Tale</i> . |
| King Richard II . . . | 1593 . . . | <i>s.</i> Holinshed; Stowe's <i>Annals</i> . |
| Rape of Lucrece . . . | 1593-94 . . . | <i>s.</i> Ovid, <i>Fasts</i> , ii.; Chaucer, etc |
| King Richard III . . . | 1594 . . . | <i>s.</i> Holinshed (based on Sir Thomas More's <i>Richard III</i>). |
| Love's Labour Lost . . . | <i>c.</i> 1593-94 . . . | Euphuistic; quasi-historical. |
| King John . . . | <i>c.</i> 1595 . . . | <i>s.</i> 'The Troublesome Raigne of John, King of England' (1591) |
| Romeo and Juliet . . . | <i>c.</i> 1596 (1st draft, 1591) | <i>s.</i> Arthur Brooke's poem (1562) after Bandello (1554). |
| King Henry IV (pts. 1 and 2) . . . | (1) 1596-97; (2) 1598-99 | <i>s.</i> Holinshed and chronicle-plays. |
| Merchant of Venice . . . | <i>c.</i> 1596 . . . | <i>s.</i> Fiorentino and other It. novelists; Marlowe, <i>Jew of Malta</i> . |
| Taming of the Shrew . . . | <i>b.</i> 1594 and 1601 | <i>Sh.</i> part-author; <i>s.</i> <i>Arabian Nights</i> , etc. |
| Troilus and Cressida . . . | <i>c.</i> 1599 (1st draft <i>c.</i> 1602 (2nd rev.)) | <i>s.</i> Chaucer, Caxton, Lydgate. |
| Much Ado about Nothing . . . | 1599 . . . | <i>s.</i> Ariosto; Bandello. |
| King Henry V . . . | 1599 . . . | <i>s.</i> Holinshed. |
| As You Like It . . . | 1599 . . . | <i>s.</i> Lodge, <i>Rosalynde</i> . |
| Merry Wives of Windsor . . . | <i>c.</i> 1600 . . . | <i>s.</i> Fiorentino and other It. novelists. |
| Hamlet . . . | <i>c.</i> 1601 . . . | <i>s.</i> Saxo, <i>Hist. Danica</i> (12th century), through Belleforest's <i>Hist. Tragiques</i> . |
| Julius Cæsar . . . | <i>c.</i> 1601 . . . | <i>s.</i> North's <i>Plutarch's Lives</i> . |
| Twelfth Night . . . | 1601-2 . . . | <i>s.</i> Bandello; Belleforest. |
| All's Well that Ends Well . . . | <i>c.</i> 1602 . . . | <i>s.</i> <i>Decameron</i> . |
| Measure for Measure . . . | <i>c.</i> 1603 . . . | <i>s.</i> Whetstone, <i>Promos and Cassandra</i> (1578). |
| Othello . . . | 1604 . . . | <i>s.</i> Cinthio (It. novelist). |
| King Lear . . . | 1605 . . . | <i>s.</i> Holinshed, and old plays. |
| Macbeth . . . | 1605-6 . . . | <i>s.</i> Holinshed; King James, <i>Demonology</i> (1599). |
| Pericles . . . | <i>c.</i> 1607-8 . . . | <i>Sh.</i> part-author (?); <i>s.</i> Gower, <i>Confessio Amantis</i> . |
| Antony and Cleopatra . . . | 1607-8 . . . | <i>s.</i> North's <i>Plutarch's Lives</i> . |
| Coriolanus . . . | <i>c.</i> 1608-10 . . . | <i>s.</i> North's <i>Plutarch's Lives</i> . |
| Cymbeline . . . | <i>c.</i> 1609-10 . . . | <i>s.</i> Holinshed, Boccaccio. |
| Sonnets . . . | 1609 (<i>ed. pr.</i>) . . . | Partly auto-biog., partly sonneteering-vogue |
| Winter's Tale . . . | 1610-11 . . . | <i>s.</i> Greene, <i>Pandosto</i> (novel 1588); Ovid, <i>Met.</i> xi. |
| Tempest . . . | 1610-11 . . . | <i>s.</i> unknown; various. |
| King Henry VIII . . . | <i>c.</i> 1612 . . . | <i>Sh.</i> part-author; <i>s.</i> Holinshed, etc. |
| Timon of Athens . . . | unknown . . . | <i>Sh.</i> part-author (?); <i>s.</i> North's <i>Plutarch</i> . |

CHAPTER VII

THE PROGRESS OF PROSE

'There never was, anywhere, anything like the sixty or seventy years that elapsed from the middle of Elizabeth's reign to the period of the Restoration ; . . . nor can anyone have a tolerably adequate idea of the riches of our language and our native genius who has not made himself acquainted with the prose-writers, as well as the poets, of this memorable period '.

FRANCIS JEFFREY.

ENGLAND'S victory over Spain in 1588—to go back to that landmark in history—meant more than the defeat of the Armada. To the brave sea pirates of that age, swaggering on Plymouth Hoe, or to the patriotic noblemen and gentles who helped to furnish their ships and crews, it might seem the summit of ambition to have a brush with the Spaniard and to bring home an argosy of spoils. Even to Elizabeth in her glory, and, it must be added, in her miserliness, 'the singeing of the King of Spain's beard', which was the formal object, for instance, of Drake's expedition to Cadiz in the year before the Armada, may well have appeared not merely the outward symbol but the informing design of the foreign policy of her reign. To the historical sense, however, the victory of her arms at sea wears another and a deeper aspect. It is

ranged in the perspective of time with a long series of changes, progressive and victorious, on the whole, in kindred and alien spheres, the total effect of which was to widen the Englishman's horizon, to extend his homekeeping boundaries to the limits of the ocean, to familiarize his intellect with the problems of local self-government and colonial administration, and to burden the nation lately emancipated from mediævalism with the responsibilities and duties of commercial sea-power.

These are formidable claims, and it will be well to examine with a little more precision the actual political inheritance—using the term of *πόλις* in its old and most comprehensive sense—bequeathed to England by the Tudors.

Take, first, the economic revolution, and the victory of trade over feudalism. We have marked the signs of this movement in a previous chapter, but we have still to note that the change from tillage to pasture, and from corn-growing to sheep-farming, together with the transition from the system of barons and retainers to that of landlords and tenants, brought with it the desire to make agriculture pay. A commercial spirit overgrew the old feudal indifference to the economic conditions of agrarian success, under which the sons of the soil were conscript to the lords of the manor, and a sufficiency of food was the utmost it was required to yield. Henry VIII's suppression of the monasteries gave a great impetus to the transition. The monks had held as much as a quarter, perhaps, of the agricultural land, and its new owners were keen to make a profit by developing the possibilities of wool.

Literature is interested in this change, the actual details of which we need not follow more closely, to a considerable extent. Shakespeare, whose keen business faculties were balanced, as is so frequently the case, by a sane sense of public interest, resisted successfully the attempt to enclose for the benefit of a private owner the common fields at Welcombe, near Stratford*. Thomas Tusser's *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* has already been mentioned, and Barnaby Googe supplies another instance in this age of the agriculturist as a man of letters. Lastly, Bacon's essay *of Gardens* may be selected as a sign of a great landowner's interest in the lighter duties of his estate.

Another aspect of the dominance of a wider conception of statecraft is to be sought in the industrial history of Elizabeth's reign. Not merely were the precious metals stocked, so that there was more capital to apply to production, and the habit of saving was encouraged, but direct steps, marking the emergence from the Middle Ages, were taken towards the reorganization of business on modernized lines. Thus, the Statute of Apprentices of 1563 was not repealed till 1813. New trading companies, deriving their authority from the Crown, began to replace the old municipal craft guilds; and Queen Elizabeth, like Edward III, went to Flanders for foreign skilled labourers who were regularly licensed as alien immigrants, and who were intended to aid English manufactures. We need only refer to the construction of

* See R. E. Prothero, on Agriculture, in *Social England*, ch. XI.

the Royal Exchange in 1566, and to the fact that in 1569 a loan was raised by the Government without recourse to foreign bankers for further proof of the progress of industry. Poor Law Relief—a prominent part of Elizabethan legislation—belongs to the same set of circumstances which operated in the economic and in the industrial spheres. It is inferred along lines of evidence which need not here be adduced, though the genuine student should seek them in such authoritative writers as Thorold Rogers and Cunningham, that it was chiefly the upper and middle strata of society who benefited by these changes. The political wisdom which raised the status of these classes without a corresponding regard to the interests of the artisan and labouring community is open to criticism, and at a later period we may see how this lack of foresight affected the peace and prosperity of the country: here we are concerned to note that these social conditions directly encouraged the burst of literary activity for which this period is remarkable, by giving vigour, ambition, leisure, new powers and opportunities to precisely those classes of society which control the exercises of culture.

The broader outlook on life, towards which these changes were avenues, was reached more literally by the progress of exploration in the reign. Contemporary evidence of the utmost value is afforded by the records and compilations of Richard Hakluyt (1552 ?–1616) and Samuel Purchas (1575 ?–1626) and by the independent narratives of certain sea-captains such as Sir John Davis, who died in 1605. From these sources we derive

our acquaintance with Drake, Frobisher, Hawkins, Oxenham, Fenton, and others, who were at once traders, pirates, fighters, and discoverers, and whose splendid courage, dogged perseverance, and simple singleness of purpose atone for much that is discreditable in their methods and morals. It was the heroic age of English seamanship, and literature has a direct interest, not merely in Hakluyt's *Trafficks and Discoveries* and in Purchas *His Pilgrims*, but likewise in Raleigh's narrative of Grenville's last fight in *The Revenge* (subsequently the subject of a ballad by Tennyson); in such scientific treatises as Gilbert of Colchester's *De Magnete* (1600), Sir John Davis's *Seaman's Secrets* (1594), Bourne's *Regiment of the Sea* (1573), etc.; in the contemplation of Mercator's chart in 1569, and in the travellers' tales, all of which effected in fine for geographical knowledge what Hooker effected for religion, Bacon for philosophy, and Shakespeare for the stage. The tangible treasures which were poured into England at this time—strange argosies brought with untold peril from the deep—were only the visible symbols of the measureless wealth added to the speech and literature of Englishmen. How enlarged was the epic of England, free of the ocean-ways, since the epic of Chaucer's pilgrims whose adventurous journey was confined to the road between London and Canterbury; how full the mere vocabulary of geographical names had grown!; how rich the sentiment of patriotism!; how confident and daring the spirit of national enterprise!

There is one more aspect to be included in this cursory survey of the forces making for enlarge-

ment. The steady growth of Puritanism and the religious struggle of the age between Rome and Geneva, with the attempts at compromise to which it gave rise, were movements which engaged the services of eminent men of letters. Grotius, the Dutch statesman (1583-1645), writing of England in 1605, declared that 'theology rules there'; and apart from this collateral testimony to the dominance of theological ideas, we possess the direct evidence of the famous Book of *Martyrs*, compiled by John Foxe (1516-1587); of the Sermons by Latimer and other divines; of the *Defence of the Government of the Church of England*, by Dr. Bridges, Dean of Salisbury, published in 1587; of the pamphlets of John Udall, who died in prison in 1592, and who is to be distinguished from Nicholas Udall, playwright and Provost of Eton, on *The State of the Church of England* and *Demonstration of Discipline*; of the 'Martin Marprelate' controversy, which led to a Royal Proclamation and the seizure of secret printing-presses in 1589; and, finally, of the life and writings of Richard Hooker, described by the Rev. W. H. Hutton* as 'the greatest master of English prose whom the great age of Elizabeth produced'.

Thus, along several lines we see that the tendency of English thought had set in the direction of expansion. Spenser's triumph in romance, the Lord High Admiral's victory at sea, Bacon's conquest of nature, Shakespeare's mastery of the theatre, were so many parallel and simultaneous indications of the spirit which moved the nation—

* *Social England*, ch. xii.

'signs of the times', as the phrase goes, which jointly enable us to realize the immense fertilizing force comprised in the term 'Elizabethan'.

Richard Hooker, the 'judicious' Hooker, as later admirers have called him, an epithet which should not exclude his right to Hallam's eulogy of the 'knight of romance among caittiff brawlers', was born at Heavitree near Exeter, in 1553. Like so many of his contemporaries who afterwards came to greatness, he was of obscure origin, and he owed his Oxford education to the kindness of friends. Bishop Jewel, of Salisbury, and Dr. Sandys, Bishop of London, and afterwards Archbishop of York, were his earliest patrons, and he became tutor to Sandys's sons, and a fellow of Corpus Christi College. On his marriage he obtained the living of Drayton Beauchamp in Buckinghamshire, and a year or two later he was appointed Master of the Temple. This post he subsequently resigned for a living in Wiltshire, and he died in 1600 at Bishopsbourne, near Canterbury. His *Treatise on the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* was planned in eight books, of which the first four were published in 1594, the long fifth in 1597, and the remaining three were left unfinished, and are not accessible in their correct form today.

Francis Bacon, afterwards Baron Verulam and Viscount St Albans, was born in 1561, in very different circumstances. He was a Londoner by birth, the son of Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, and a nephew of Burghley, Elizabeth's most trusty statesman, by his marriage with a sister of Bacon's mother. He survived Elizabeth and James I, dying in 1626, after filling the

high offices of Solicitor General, Attorney General, and Lord Chancellor, but, alas ! he survived his honour. In 1621, he was impeached for accepting bribes in the exercise of his function as a judge, and there is reason to believe that these acts, to which he pleaded guilty, were but a part of a long record of time-serving and corruption during his official career. The King and his Court dealt mercifully with the convicted chancellor when the public conscience had been vindicated by his exposure and punishment, but the end of his life was overshadowed by disgrace as his opening years had been spent in the shadow of neglect. He had been a younger son, and Sir Nicholas had died when he was eighteen. His friends were slow to help him, and Burghley did nothing to promote his interests. He owed his success to his own brilliant talents, and to his proved capacity for the supple employment of those talents for mean and servile ends directed to his self-advancement. ' I have taken all knowledge to be my province ', he wrote while yet a young man with unaffected enthusiasm to Burghley ; and no one disputes his title to that proconsulship. But perhaps he was spoiled as a boy, when the Queen used to delight in his precocity and termed him ' the young Lord Keeper ', or perhaps the early disappointments which chequered his career warped his sense of public honour. However that may be, the great statesman and philosopher who took all knowledge for his province was impeached and convicted of bribery at sixty years of age.

With the names of Hooker and Bacon, the student of English literature reaches a new point of

departure. Hitherto he has mainly been occupied with the names of England's poets. He has tried to reconstruct the circumstances in which Chaucer was inspired to arrest the passing shows of a pilgrimage to Canterbury in the fourteenth century. He has watched the conditions of Court life in Elizabeth's reign, and has seen the emergence of Spenser at the top of that wave of romance which swept across the country like incense. He has walked the boards with Shakespeare, and has followed intelligently the success of that masterful playwright in satisfying the tastes of an Elizabethan audience. These have been the striking names, the salient features in the survey of nearly three hundred years, during which England has developed from a little island outside the sphere of progress to the island-centre of an Empire in the van of civilization. But this survey has hardly had occasion to take account of the names of prose-writers. There was John Wiclif, the divine, who was rather a preacher than an author; there was Roger Ascham, the schoolmaster, who was primarily a teacher; there were the chroniclers, like Holinshed, who served as a quarry for the poets, and there were the compilers of what has justly been called 'the prose-epic of England', such as Hakluyt and Purchas, whose names, however, are more renowned in literary history than on the lips and in the affections of their readers. Further, there were the writers who occupied us in a previous chapter, and who were chiefly concerned to provide a prose-style for a clique, without a clear and direct interest in the tastes of the public at large. The affectations of the 'letter-hunters'

perished with the society that affected them, and even John Lyly, with his *Euphues*, who set the crown on their performance, is chiefly rememberable today for the impulse which he gave to English prose in certain mechanical devices, such as the antithesis of sentences, rather than for the 'lady's casket' books with which he diverted the Court. Sir Thomas More, who wrote the *Utopia* in Latin, and Sir Philip Sidney, who wrote the *Arcadia* and the *Apologie for Poetrie*, have distinct places in this record, but they have not the splendid note of Hooker and Bacon in prose, of Spenser and Shakespeare in verse.

How can we support this proposition? What is, after all, great prose, and how shall we recognize it? What is its excellence, its essence?

There is one line of inspiration, tending to the development of a prose-style, which has been omitted from the foregoing remarks. The translator was at work, and the noblest of his works was the translation of the Bible. Let us hear what John Richard Green has to say on this subject in his *History of the English People*:

The popularity of the Bible had been growing fast . . . by the continued recitation of both Old Testament and New in the public services of the Church; while the small Geneva Bibles carried the Scripture into every home, and wove it into the life of every English family. . . . The book was equally important in its bearing on the intellectual development of the people. Sunday after Sunday, day after day, the crowds that gathered round the Bible in the nave of St. Paul's, or the family group that hung on its words in the devotional exercises at home, were leavened with a new literature. . . . The disclosure of the stores of Greek literature had wrought the revolution of the Renaissance. The disclosures of the older mass of Hebrew literature wrought the revolution of the Reformation.

But the one revolution was far deeper and wider in its effects than the other. . . . The language of the Hebrew, the idiom of the Hellenistic Greek lent themselves with a curious felicity to the purposes of translation. As a mere literary monument the English version of the Bible remains the noblest example of the English tongue, while its perpetual use made it from the instant of its appearance the standard of our language. For the moment, however, its literary effect was less than its social. . . . Even to common minds this familiarity with grand poetic imagery in prophet and apocalypse gave a loftiness and ardour of expression that with all its tendency to exaggeration and bombast we may prefer to the slipshod vulgarisms of today. But far greater than its effect on literature or social phrase was the effect of the Bible on the character of the people at large. . . . The whole moral effect which is produced nowadays by the religious newspaper, the tract, the essay, the missionary report, the sermon, was then produced by the Bible alone; and its effect in this way, however dispassionately we examine it, was simply amazing. The whole nation became a Church.

Book vii. Ch. I.

Our quotation is long, but it is yet too short to be adequate to the eloquent testimony paid by historian after historian to the influence of the translated Scriptures on the literature and thought of England from the times of the Tudors downwards. The names of the Tudor translators were William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale, of whom the elder collaborator was burned at the stake in 1536, and the younger, who rose to be Bishop of Exeter, lived from 1488-1568. Their version of the Bible was quickly followed by the *editio princeps* of the Book of Common Prayer in 1549, and it is a matter for most ardent rejoicing that the standard translations of these books should have been fashioned in the age of England's greatest exaltation and expansion. Their language, which has passed into common parlance, and is interwoven with the

texture of our very thoughts, is the language of the times in which Shakespeare wrote, and Raleigh wrought, and Sidney lived. Their books which were to influence English life till 'the whole nation became a church' contain that noble grandeur, that splendid serenity, that bigness, strength, and virility, that music, and rhythm, that fearlessness, that completeness, that directness, which we noted above as the 'intellectual and spiritual atmosphere' of the Elizabethan age at its best.

We might almost trace the lineage of the sons of the Bible descended in direct line from Tyndale and Coverdale. Hugh Latimer, whom Mary burned; John Knox, the Scottish reformer; John Fox, the Marian martyrologist; Fuller, Andrewes, Jeremy Taylor, John Bunyan, and John Milton himself; Carlyle and Ruskin in the nineteenth century—these are only the greatest of the writers whose grand or homely style derived its force and picturesqueness from this 'well of English undefiled'. And if to that source of inspiration we add the contents of the works of Sir Thomas Malory, the earliest of the translators and compilers, whose *Morte d'Arthur* was printed by Caxton in 1485, of North's *Plutarch* and Florio's *Montaigne*, which balanced in prose the splendid poetical versions of Virgil by Phæar, of Homer by Chapman, of Tasso by Fairfax, and Ariosto by Harington, we see that a body of prose was lying ready to hand which, though not original in English, contained the spark to fire originality.

We do not contend that great prose, or great poetry either for that matter, is necessarily identical with Biblical English. But we do reasonably

maintain that the pervasion of men's minds with the style and diction of the Bible and, in a less degree, of the Greek and Roman classics, supplied a sense of prose-style, and a standard for the construction of sentences and paragraphs, which were invaluable to the development of an English prose-style and of that *soi-disant* 'prose' which everyone talks in common speech.

Let us look at the facts for a moment. Latimer, who was burned with Ridley in 1555, and who protested at the stake that 'we shall this day light such a candle in England as shall never be extinguished', was the author of sermons from the thirty-fifth of which we would quote the following passage of rhetoric :

And now I would ask a strange question ; who is the most diligent bishop and prelate in all England, and passeth all the rest in doing his office ? I can tell, for I know him who he is ; I know him well ; but now methinks I see you listening and hearkening that I should name him. There is one that passeth all the other, and is the most diligent prelate and preacher in all England. And will ye know who it is ? I will tell you : It is the devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all other ; he is never out of his diocese ; he is never from his cure ; ye shall never find him unoccupied ; he is ever in his parish ; he keepeth residence at all times ; ye shall never find him out of the way, call for him when ye will ; he is ever at home ; the most diligent preacher in all the realm. He is ever at his plough ; no lording nor loitering may hinder him ; he is ever applying to his business ; ye shall never find him idle, I warrant you. And his office is to hinder religion, to maintain superstition, to set up idolatry, to teach all kind of popery. He is as ready as can be wished for to set forth his plough ; to devise as many ways as can be to deface and obscure God's glory. Where the devil is resident, and hath his plough going, there away with books and up with candles ; away with Bibles and up with beads ; away with the light of the gospel, and up with the light of candles, yea, at noon-day. Where the devil is resident,

that he may prevail, up with all superstition and idolatry ; censing, painting of images, candles, palms, ashes, holy water, and new service of men's inventing ; as though man could invent a better way to honour God with, than God himself hath appointed. Down with Christ's cross, up with purgatory pickpurse, up with popish purgatory, I mean. Away with clothing the naked, the poor and impotent, up with decking of images, and gay garnishing of stocks and stones ; up with man's traditions and his laws, down with God's will and his most holy word. Down with the old honour due unto God, and up with the new god's honour. Let all things be done in Latin : there must be nothing but Latin, not so much as, 'Remember man that thou art ashes, and into ashes shalt thou return'.

Joseph Hall, Bishop of Norwich (1574-1656), who wrote satires in his youth and sermons in his old age, has left, among other prose-writings, a sketch of 'The Happy Man', from which we may take an extract :

Censures and applauses are passengers to him, not guests : his ear is their thoroughfare, not their harbour ; he hath learned to fetch both his counsel and his sentence from his own breast. He doth not lay weight upon his own shoulders, as one that loves to torment himself with the honour of much employment ; but as he makes work his game, so doth he not list to make himself work. His strife is ever to redeem and not to spend time. It is his trade to do good, and to think of it his recreation. He hath hands enough for himself and others, which are ever stretched forth for beneficence, not for need. He walks cheerfully the way that God hath chalked and never wishes it more wide, or more smooth. . . . He is well provided for both worlds, and is sure of peace here, of glory hereafter ; and therefore hath a light heart, and a cheerful face. All his fellow-creatures rejoice to serve him ; his betters, the angels, love to observe him ; God himself takes pleasure to converse with him ; and hath sainted him before his death, and in his death crowned him.

Thomas Fuller (1608-1661), the writer of a

Church History, and of the more famous compilation *The Worthies of England and Wales*, though he belongs, of course, to the seventeenth century, may be cited in this place, and we select his description of 'The Good Sea-Captain', written, it should be remembered, little more than half a century later than the exploits of the Elizabethan explorers :

Conceive him now in a man of war, with his letters of marque, victualled, and appointed.

The more power he hath, the more careful he is not to abuse it. Indeed a sea captain is a king in the island of a ship, supreme judge, above appeal, in causes civil and criminal, and is seldom brought to an account in courts of justice on land, for injuries done to his own men at sea.

He is careful in observing the Lord's day. He hath a watch in his heart, though no bells in a steeple to proclaim that day by ringing to prayers.

He is as pious and thankful when a tempest is past as devout when 'tis present ; not clamorous to receive mercies and tongue-tied to return thanks. Escaping many dangers makes him not presumptuous to run into them.

In taking a prize he most prizeth the men's lives whom he takes ; though some of them may chance to be negroes or savages. 'Tis the custom of some to cast them overboard, and there's an end of them : for the dumb fishes will tell no tales. But the murder is not so soon drowned as the man. What, is a brother of false blood no kin ; a savage hath God to his father by creation, though not the church to his mother, and God will revenge his innocent blood. But our captain counts the image of God nevertheless his image cut, in ebony as if done in ivory.

In dividing the gains he wrongs none who took pains to get them. Not shifting off his poor mariners with nothing.

In time of peace he quietly returns home.

His voyages are not only for profit, but some for honour and knowledge.

He daily sees, and duly considers God's wonders in the deep.

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667) was Fuller's contemporary, and was even a greater ornament of the

Anglican Church. As a writer, he has been compared both with Spenser and Shakespeare, and his style has been described as 'uniformly magnificent'. He wrote a life of Christ under the title of *The Great Exemplar*, and among many other theological works the most famous, perhaps, are his *Rules and Exercises of Holy Living* (1650) and of *Holy Dying* (1651), from which the following excerpts are taken :

In sickness the soul begins to dress herself for immortality. And first, she unties the strings of vanity that made her upper garment cleave to the world and sit uneasy. First she puts off the light and fantastic summer-robe of lust and wanton appetite.

Next to this, the soul by the help of sickness knocks off the fetters of pride, and vainer complacencies. Then she draws the curtains, and stops the light from coming in, and takes the pictures down, those fantastic images of self-love, and gay remembrances of vain opinion, and popular noises. Then the spirit stoops into the sobrieties of humble thoughts, and feels corruption chiding the forwardness of fancy and allaying the vapours of conceit and factious opinions.

Next to these, as the soul is still undressing, she shakes off the roughness of her great and little angers and animosities, and receives the oil of mercies and smooth forgiveness, fair interpretations and gentle answers, designs of reconciliation and christian atonement, in their places.

I have seen the rays of the sun or moon dash upon a brazen vessel, whose lips kissed the face of those waters that lodged within its bosom ; but being turned back and sent off, with its smooth pretences or rougher waftings, it wandered about the room and beat upon the roof, and still doubled its heat and motion. So is sickness and a sorrow entertained by an unquiet and discontented man.

Nothing is more unreasonable than to entangle our spirits in wildness and amazement, like a partridge fluttering in a net, which she breaks not, though she breaks her wings.

Here, then, are five examples of English prose,

selected from philosophers and divines during, roughly, the hundred years from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth centuries. What is there to say about this writing ? ; how is it to be distinguished from the prose which you and I daily use in our ordinary speech, or in our letters to friends ? ; what are its marks and characteristics ? ; what elements of value does it add to that heritage of English letters, the ' knowledge-value ' of which, as the imperishable possession of Englishmen, we are trying to discover ?

In the first place, there is the vocabulary-test, the test, that is to say, by the range of ideas which can be expressed. In Chapter I of this book we saw that the number of words used ' in everyday affairs is remarkably small, and that progress in the use of words is marked by an increase in the number employed, till the vocabulary of the greatest writers is limited only by the bounds of their imagination. Shakespeare is said to have used as many as fifteen thousand words ; the common labourer of today is supposed to control as few as five hundred. Now, taking the passages above, we may note the following words as typical of the wealth of language from which the writers drew :

Purgatory pickpurse.

Gay garnishing.

His ear is their thoroughfare, not their harbour.

The way that God hath chalked.

Letters of marque.

Dumb fishes tell no tales.

Innocent blood.

The image of God.

His image cut in ebony or ivory (*i.e.* black man or white)

God's wonders in the deep.
The fetters of pride.
Fair interpretations and gentle answers.
Like a partridge fluttering in a net.

There is plainly power in these examples, the power to depart from common-place observation and to invent and to adapt expressive forms of language for ideas worthy to be expressed. The metaphor and antithesis in the 'harbour' and 'thoroughfare' of the ear; the image of the 'chalked' way of God; the simile of the 'partridge', and the sentiments stirred by the allusion to 'dumb fishes': these are specimens of style in prose, which help us to see how great writers combine the words in the dictionary—those serried regiments of servants waiting the master's commands—to the expression of thoughts conceived in their own brains.

How effective are those combinations! :—

Let all things be done in Latin : there must be nothing but Latin, not so much as 'Remember man that thou art ashes and into ashes shalt thou return'.

In this sentence there is nothing but a verse from the Psalms, and a combination of the simplest English words, *Latin, things, nothing, so much as, not, done, must, all*, etc. Yet Latimer has combined them to an expression of scorn for the Roman or popish church ceremonies which still rings true today. He takes this verse of Holy Scripture, which reminds us in unapproachable simplicity of the vanity of human life, and re-affirms its essential claim on our daily meditation by the irony which he pours on the Latinizers. There are

a high imagination and a noble purpose, and a vivid scorn in this paragraph ; it is good, nervous, English prose, with the emphasis thrown on the *Latin* by the rhythm of the sentence, and the contrast suggested between the *all things* of the Latinists and the *little thing* of the Psalmist, which is the greatest thing of all.

Again :—

It is his trade to do good, and to think of it his recreation.

This example of double antithesis—a figure of speech brought by Lyly from Spain and ultimately from ancient Rome—is almost geometrical in design. The order is inverted in the two halves of the sentence, the subject leading to the predicate in the first, and the predicate to the subject in the second. Then the 'trade' is balanced by the 'recreation', and 'to do' by 'to think', so as competently to express the idea that his whole business and pleasure in life are comprised by the exercises of charity.

Again, take Jeremy Taylor's image of the soul preparing for immortality. Note how he works out the metaphor from dressing and undressing, with the 'strings of vanity', 'the summer robe of lust', the drawn curtains and the pictures. Take the 'brazen vessel, whose lips kissed the face of those waters that lodged within its bosom', and note how rich is the imagination and how musical the instrument which brings it to expression. Finally—not to be wearisome—note the debt which these authors owe to the Bible. The *build* of their sentences is borrowed from the writers who constructed our version of the Holy Scriptures. Their

images, sometimes their very *phrases*, are traceable to the same source ; and, if we may go behind the style to the minds of the men who made it, shall we not justly praise Latimer, Fuller, Taylor, and the rest, if we say that they were inspired by the Bible, and that they superadded to its inspiration the reflections due to their own experience, or gathered from their own researches ?

At this point we may return to the writings of Hooker and Bacon. Richard Hooker was a man of profound learning, whose object in intervening between the Puritans and the ceremonialists was to justify the laws of ecclesiastical polity in such a manner as 'not to provoke any, but rather to satisfy all tender consciences'. In order to work out this design, he resigned his office in the Temple and retired to the country, where, as we have seen, he died quietly in 1600. Thus, his book is likely to contain certain qualities of style in addition to those which, briefly enough, we have noted in the instances above. The old saying of Buffon, *le style c'est l'homme*, has this amount of truth, that a great writer's will and purpose affect the manner of his writing. If he aim, like Latimer, at rousing men's attention by a sermon, he will acquire, if he be sincere, the virtue of the sermonizer, which consists chiefly in the power of arresting the interest of his hearers as they sit and listen, of leading gradually their thoughts upwards, of impressing by means of parables or of incisive remarks some records on their memory, which they will carry away with them when the sermon is over, and which will settle in their minds and become a part of their spiritual equipment. A striking example

of this method may be taken from Latimer's sermon on 'Hasty Judgment'. He begins an argument as follows: 'Here I have occasion to tell you a story which happened at Cambridge'. The interest of his audience being arrested, he relates the story in simple and orderly language. He tells them that he 'was as obstinate a papist as any was in England', and so the narrative proceeds to the lesson which he wanted to drive home: 'This tale I told you by this occasion, that . . . we should not be too hasty in believing the tale, but rather suspend our judgment till we know the truth'.

Again, if—like Taylor—a writer aim at spiritual enlightenment, he will elevate his theme to a lofty level of language and keep it on that level. His reader's mood must adapt itself to the moral purpose of the writer, who will have no need to employ the devices of the preacher speaking to an audience. The preacher builds up the mood by the fervour of his own inspiration; the moralist assumes it, and starts from that point of departure. Thus, he can use more allusive language than the preacher, who must be straightway understood or he loses touch with his hearers. The moral writer, that is to say, may wind his meaning through more devious paths of thought, may pursue a fancy by the way, may go away from his argument and return to it, and may avail himself throughout of the heightened language of spiritual sentiment in order to maintain in his readers the same exalted mood. So Mr. Hamilton Thompson writes of Jeremy Taylor:—

No prose is more melodious than that of this great divine; his periods, though often immeasurably long, and evoking, in a series of subordinate clauses and illustrations, a train of images and comparisons, one springing out of another, roll on with a soft and mighty swell which has something of the enchantment of verse. . . . The atmosphere of his work is close. . . . He had studied the Fathers so intensely that he had become infected with something of the lavish and oriental imagery which abounds in so many of these great writers *.

Hooker's aim was different both from Latimer's and Taylor's or, rather, it transcended both. Hooker, too, was a preacher, both by training and design, for he wanted to conciliate the audience in either camp. Similarly, he was a moralist, aiming, like all divines, at raising the standard of conduct from the plains of mundane contemplation. But he surpassed these other writers in his logical purpose. He had a proposition to prove, an argument to sustain, a conclusion to reach; and, though we do not possess the whole of his work on the laws of ecclesiastical polity, the existing Books are penetrated by the light of a reasonable will. He adds the strength of reason to the power of fervour and to the sweetness of piety, and his prose is greater for the addition. His First Book opens, for instance, in a strain of eloquent reasoning :

He that goeth about to persuade a multitude that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favourable hearers, because they know the manifold defects whereunto every kind of regiment is subject, but the secret lets and difficulties, which in public proceedings are innumerable and inevitable, they have not ordinarily the judgment to consider. And because such as openly reprove supposed disorders of state are taken for principal friends to the common benefit

* *A History of English Literature.* Murray. Pp. 272.

of all, and for men that carry singular freedom of mind, under this fair and plausible colour, whatsoever they utter passes for good and current. That which wanteth in the weight of their speech is supplied by the aptness of men's minds to accept and believe it. Whereas, on the other side, etc.

It is impossible to construct rules for excellence in prose, nor is it as easy to recognize the elements of prose-style in practice as in the instance of poetry. But here we note not merely the admirable choice of words, which give dignity and weight; the swing and balance of the sentences, and the rhythm of their movement: we note further, and for the first time, the element of reasoned argument, the shape of which may be traced by the phrases of logical transition, 'because', 'whereas', etc., above, and 'but also', 'albeit', 'yet', and so forth, in the succeeding clauses. This is new in English prose, the early theological bias of which had not hitherto been developed on the logical side. Lyly and the early Elizabethans had necessarily attended more to the manner of their prose than to the matter which it set forth, for they lacked an urgent topic. Therefore, they chiefly imitated the most 'mannered' writers of former times or other countries, and they even exaggerated such mannerisms. Hooker, absorbed by his subject, was less consciously concerned with his style, and he gradually perfected his instruments of expression till he used them with something of Plato's eloquence and Aristotle's cogency. We can trace this development by examples. The following passage, for instance, is imperfect in expression, because the two parts of the comparison, though clearly conceived, are

left in the rough, with the bare copula 'in like manner':—

The stateliness of houses, the goodliness of trees, when we behold them delighteth the eye, but that foundation which beareth up the one, that root which ministereth unto the other nourishment and life, is in the bosom of the earth concealed; and if there be at any time occasion to search into it, such labour is then more necessary than pleasant, both to them which undertake it, and for the lookers-on. In like manner the use and benefit of good laws, all that live under them may enjoy with delight and comfort, albeit the grounds and first original causes from whence they have sprung be unknown as to the greatest part of men they are. But when they do withdraw their obedience, pretend that the laws which they should obey are corrupt and vicious, for better examination of their quality, it behoveth the very foundation and root, the highest well-spring and fountain of them to be discovered.

In the following passage the argument is lofty, and is presented in a masterly manner:

Now that which man doth desire with reference to a further end, the same he desireth in such measure as is unto that end convenient; but what he coveteth as good in itself, towards that his desire is ever infinite. So that unless the last good of all which is desired altogether for itself be also infinite, we do evil in making it our end, even as they who placed their felicity in wealth, or honour, or pleasure, or anything here attained, because in desiring anything as our final perfection which is not so we do amiss. Nothing may be infinitely desired but that good which indeed is infinite: for the better, the more desirable; that therefore most desirable wherein there is infinity of goodness. So that if anything desirable may be infinite, that must needs be the highest of all things that are desired. No good is infinite but only God, therefore He is our felicity and bliss.

Finally, we may quote as an example of the sustained eloquence of Hooker his conclusion to the Fourth Book:

That which especially concerneth ourselves in the present matter we treat of is the state of reformed religion, a thing at her coming to the crown even raised as it were by miracle from the dead, a thing which we so little hoped to see, that even they which beheld it done scarcely believed their own senses at the first beholding. Yet being then brought to pass, thus many years it hath continued, standing by no other worldly mean but that one only hand which erected it, that hand which as no kind of imminent danger could cause at the first to withhold itself, so neither have the practices, so many, so bloody, following since, been ever able to make weary. Nor can we say in this case so justly, that Aaron and Hur, the ecclesiastical and civil states, have sustained the hand which did lift itself to heaven for them; as that heaven itself hath by this hand sustained them, no aid or help having thereunto been ministered for performance of the work of reformation, other than such kind of help or aid as the angel in the prophet Zechariah speaketh of, saying: "Neither by an army nor strength, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Which grace and favour of divine assistance having not in one thing or two showed itself, nor for some few days or years appeared, but in such sorts so long continued, our manifold sins and transgressions striving to the contrary: what can we less thereupon conclude, than that God would at leastwise by tract of time teach the world that the thing which He blesseth, defendeth, keepeth, so strangely, cannot choose but be of Him? Wherefore, if any refuse to believe us, disputing for the verity of religion established, let them believe God himself thus miraculously working for it, and wish life even for ever and ever unto that glorious and sacred instrument whereby He worketh.

We reach the greater name of Bacon—greater because of his services to the cause of truth; because he took as his province, not a single department of human knowledge, as Hooker in his *Laws*, but the whole of philosophy; because his interest and scope were not confined to the field of ecclesiastical polity, but to the polity of man and nature. It is not proposed in this volume to examine the value of Bacon's contribution to science. This is not a history of philosophy, but

a study of the approaches to English literature. Bacon's aims, as a literary man, are more important than his results, and his aim undoubtedly was practical. His object was to reach, by the inductive method of reasoning, a scheme or philosophy of life and conduct which should increase enjoyment, by discovering the best and most rational use of the reasoning powers and of the resources of natural and applied science. The improvement of the condition of mankind, though not the highest exercise of reason, was an aim particularly appropriate to the age in which Bacon lived. For the pursuit of truth in that age along lines of philosophical inquiry was so strongly impregnated with the theological bias that it was almost impossible to maintain a practical end. This is essentially the task which Bacon set himself to perform through the series of works which would have been called the *Instauratio Magna*, or *The Great Institution of True Philosophy*. That he did not complete the scheme matters hardly at all. The important thing is that he conceived it, and that he added to the resources of English prose a whole language of philosophical argument, thus increasing incalculably the debt owed to the Elizabethans, and especially to Hooker, for an apparatus of prose-style. Particularly valuable in this regard, apart from its aspect as a permanent contribution to learning, is Part II of the *Instauratio Magna*, entitled the *Novum Organum*. The famous classification of errors, as idols of the Tribe, the Den, the Market-place, and the Theatre, occurs in this book, and is a picturesque and invaluable attempt to trace the sources of human error beyond the

logical fallacies of the schoolmen to their psychological springs.

There is another reason why it is unnecessary in this place to examine the Baconian philosophy in detail, and it arises out of the constructive plan by which Bacon was governed. A later English writer, William Wordsworth, the poet (1770-1850), used a phrase about his writings which may be quoted here. He compared his works to a cathedral, in which his longest poem, *The Excursion*, containing his philosophy of life, was the main architectural building, and certain shorter poems were the ante-chapels and ornaments, carrying out the central design, but capable of being studied separately. Bacon has likewise left us the ante-chapels and ornaments grouped about the central scheme of the *Instauratio Magna*. The practical aim of his philosophical design is carried out in the *Essays*, or 'Counsels, civil and moral', which, as he wrote in his Dedication to the Duke of Buckingham, have been the 'most current' of all his works, 'for that, as it seems, they come home to men's business and bosoms'. These *Essays* treat of a variety of subjects, social, moral and political: *Of Truth, of Death, of Revenge, of Love, of Great Place, of Empire, of Seeming Wise, of Friendship, of Riches, of Ambition, of Gardens*, to select a few of the eight-and-fifty which were published in 1625 from the previous editions of 1597 and 1602. They are 'essays' in the literal sense in which Bacon used the word—attempts at definition or description, tentative moralizing, notes towards a treatise, and so forth. Bacon, we are aware, kept a commonplace book, in which he would jot down

reflections on life and conduct, on the character of those he met, or the motives of their acts, or the most expedient manner of dealing with them, as well as on general themes, remarks, epigrams, stories, and so forth. The essays are little more than an elaboration of certain entries in the commonplace-books. They are not 'essays' in the modern sense of reasoned and polished disquisitions on a given subject, with a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion such, for instance, as the essays which Thomas Babington Macaulay, (1800-1859) contributed to *The Edinburgh Review*, or the essays of the great British 'feuilletonists' of the eighteenth century—Addison, Steele, and others,—or the fugitive papers of that greatest and easiest of English essayists, the inimitable and whimsical Charles Lamb (1775-1834). Bacon's 'civil and moral counsels', as he sub-titled them himself, are the shorthand notes of his intellectual activity. They contain sometimes the pith of his reflections on a theme, sometimes merely jottings for further reflection, but all alike are inspired by the shrewd, practical genius of the great thinker and statesman who rose to be Lord Chancellor and who sank to be impeached. Above all, on the moral side, they must not be taken to be complete. Bacon was not an idealist, and we miss in these essays the higher speculation which adds fervour and discipline to the writings, for instance, of Emerson and Ruskin, when dealing with such themes as Love, Beauty, and so forth. Even the attractive charm which fascinates the reader in the essays, for example, of a writer like Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) is missing from Bacon's 'counsels'.

He does not brace us, like Carlyle, nor thrill us, like Ruskin, nor make us his intimates, like Lamb, nor allure us, like Stevenson. Bacon dips his pen in the waters of mundane experience and brings it up dripping with human wisdom, thus reversing, if the simile be allowed, the process of Christian baptism. Hence his splendid sentences, which have passed into proverbial acceptance :

Revenge is a kinde of Wilde Justice, which the more Mans Nature runs to, the more ought Law to weed it out—

where note the metaphor from the garden,—revenge and justice being represented as the wild and cultivated varieties of the same plant, and law acting as the gardener.

Men in Great Place are thrice Servants : Servants of the Sovereigne or State ; Servants of Fame ; and Servants of Businesse. So as they have no Freedome ; neither in their Persons ; nor in their Actions ; nor in their Times. . . . The vices of Authoritie are chiefly foure : Delaies ; Corruption ; Roughnesse ; and Facilitie. . . . All Rising to Great Place is by a winding Staire—

where note how the writer of this essay ' of Great Place ' put ' corruption ' as one of the vices of authority, (' doe not only binde thine owne Hands or thy Servants hands from taking ' ; he wrote, ' but bind the hands of Sutours also from offring '), and fell by the vice which he denounced *. Note,

* The vice of corruption was one to which public men in the reign of Elizabeth were peculiarly liable. The liability was due largely to the conditions of official life at that time. Success and promotion depended almost entirely on individual efforts in gaining and retaining the confidence and affection of the Queen, who, with all her

too, the readiness and preciseness of the writing, the simple, sensuous style unconsciously acquired by a man who cared more for Latin than for English, and more for his meaning than for either.

The desire of Power in Excesse caused the Angels to fall; The Desire of Knowledge in Excesse caused Man to fall; But in Charity there is no Excesse; Neither can Angel or Man come in danger by it—

a passage added in 1625 to the essay of 'Goodness', not, perhaps, without a reminiscence of

greatness, was singularly capricious in her moods. It is possible to estimate the difference between such conditions and the present if we recollect that the public services depend to-day on impartial competitive examinations, whereas in those times a man's progress as statesman or courtier depended first on his personal introduction to the Court *entourage*, and, subsequently, on the favour of the monarch. A little book has recently been reprinted in an accessible form which is particularly interesting in this connection: it is the *Memoirs of Robert Cary, Earl of Monmouth*, and is published at 1s., net, in The King's Classics by Messrs. A. Moring, Ltd. Cary lived in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, and the editor of this volume remarks that 'Cary's entire relations with James I, and the persistent and undignified intrigues for "place" reflected in his memoirs, will illustrate the strange union of the romantic spirit with great worldly prudence, which appears to some extent characteristic of the age of Elizabeth'. Cary was not exposed to the same temptations of 'place' as Bacon, for he did not attain to such high rank in the public service, but if the account in this book of the adroit mixture of cajolery and flattery by which he reconciled the Queen to the fact of his marriage, and of his almost indecent haste to win the favour of James I before the breath was out of Elizabeth's body, be carefully read in connection with the facts of Bacon's biography, and with the general characteristics of the age, the student will be inclined to take a more lenient view of Bacon's susceptibility to the vice which he denounces, and will better understand the conditions of the times.

Wolsey's speech in Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII*:

Cromwell, I charge thee fling away ambition,
By that sin fell the angels.

Take, too, the following passages :—

Suspensions amongst Thoughts are like Bats amongst Birds: they ever fly by Twilight.

I cannot call Riches better than the Baggage of Vertue.

Men of Age Object too much, Consult too long, Adventure too little, Repent too soone, and seldome drive Businesse home to the full Period. . . . But for the Morall Part, perhaps Youth will have the preheminence, as Age hath for the Politique.

Houses are built to Live in, and not to Looke on.

God Almighty first Planted a Garden. And, indeed, it is the Purest of Human pleasures.

To spend too much Time in Studies is Sloth; to use them too much for Ornament is Affectation; to make Judgement wholly by their Rules is the Humour of a Scholler. . . . Some Bookes are to be Tasted, others to be Swallowed, and Some Few to be Chewed and Digested. . . . Distilled Bookes are like Common distilled Waters, Flashy Things. Reading maketh a Full Man; Conference a Ready Man; and Writing an Exact Man.

Many a Man's strength is in opposition; and when that faileth, he groweth out of use.

He that is too much in any Thing so that he giveth an other Occasion of Satietie, maketh himselfe cheape.

These extracts, taken from various essays, might be multiplied almost indefinitely: but enough will have been quoted to show the versatile genius, the profound reflective power, the neat incisiveness, and the unchanging truth, possessed and generously displayed by Francis Bacon, Earl

of Verulam. And how much of the man himself peeps out! Plainly he had suffered from the dilatoriness of 'men of age', else he had never penned a sentence so pregnant with impatience at their delays. Plainly, too, he rejoiced in the houses and gardens of his family and friends, 'the purple and fine linen' to which he was born. Plainly, too, he had met men whose 'strength is in opposition', as well as the tactless enthusiast who 'makes himself cheap'.

Bacon's self appears more clearly in other passages of these essays. The social essays which deal with 'Parents and Children', 'Marriage and Single Life', 'Love', 'Friendship', 'Sutours', etc., may be examined for signs of Bacon's limitations as well as of his intellectual greatness. The titles of another set of essays indicate the writer's moral bias—'Of Simulation, and Dissimulation', 'of Cunning', 'of Wisdom for a Man's Selfe', 'of Seeming Wise', and so forth, nor could all the precepts they contain be adopted forthwith as rules of conduct. Lastly, it has been well pointed out that the essay 'of Beauty', for example, deals solely with beauty of form—plastic beauty, as it is called,—and ignores the whole world of beauty revealed to the inward eye.

With these reservations, implicit in the facts of Bacon's biography, we may yield freely to admiration of his genius. His essays are condensed gray matter, and we may quote with approval the eulogy of Alexander Smith (1830-1867), himself an essayist of repute, who writes that

Bacon's sentence bends beneath the weight of his thought, like a branch beneath the weight of its fruit.

Bacon seems to have written his essays with Shakespeare's pen *.

With Bacon in the Caroline epoch we part company with the Elizabethans. That wonderful half-century—for it was very little more—which gave us Lyly, Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Hooker, Bacon and the rest, which gave us romance, and drama, and philosophy to match the exploits of our mariners and our victories in arms, closed in a period of decadence, leading to a period of reconstruction, the elements of which we must now examine. Obviously, England had still far to travel before the sea-power wrested by pirates and the commerce built up by robbers—to state the proposition at its worst—could be welded into the free and peaceful Empire which her king rules to-day. Obviously, too, English society, weaned under masterful Tudors from childish conditions of feudalism, had everything to win and learn in self-assertion, self-respect, and self-control, before it could reach its present height of democratic security. These victories, with all that they imply, had still to be added to the record of England's history, and to impress their effects upon her literature, when Shakespeare and Bacon died. The marvel is that the Elizabethans were able to accomplish so much in an age when so much more was to be done—before steam-power was invented, before electricity was discovered, and two hundred years before Napoleon.

* *Dreamthorp*. (Routledge's New Universal Library. Pp. 37-8.)

CHAPTER VIII

THE PURITAN REACTION

'Milton's chief talent, and indeed ~~this~~ distinguishing excellence, lies in the sublimity of his thoughts. There are others of the moderns who rival him in every other part of poetry; but in the greatness of his sentiments he triumphs over all the poets both modern and ancient, Homer only excepted'.

ADDISON

THE study of English literature till the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603 has taken us far afield. From following Chaucer's pilgrims on the road from London to Canterbury we have visited the courts of Italian Dukes; we have watched the spread of commerce along the Mediterranean sea-board; we have noted the rise of the Flemings, the English warfare with the French, and the long struggle on the Scottish border; we have seen the sun of church reform rise in Bohemia and Germany, and shed its light on our own shores; we have sailed with adventurous navigators beyond the boundaries of the known world and have engaged in a life-and-death conflict with the Empire of Spain, from which we emerged victorious by the defeat of the Armada. Henceforward, our record for a time will be more domestic in its scope. England is now self-sufficient, not in the older sense of a

power outside the hegemony of European States, but as the leading Protestant power in Europe, first in the Old World and foremost in the New; first in naval strength by the valour of Elizabethan seamen; first in literary achievement by the fame of Spenser and Shakespeare; first in learning by the weight of Bacon's philosophy. There is no longer the same obligation to take anxious counsel with other nations; the people who are safe from attack serve as models rather than imitators; and in 1603 England's foreign relations were peaceful, her expansion was secure, her trade prosperous, and the hearts of her people were unlifted by a nobility of sentiment reflected in the works of her great writers.

Accordingly, we fix our eyes on the development of England at home. She need no more invite the Flemings to teach her the arts of peace, nor need her poets go to Florence to learn the use of the pen. Genius sprang on English soil—in London, in the Midlands, in the North,—and Englishmen were ready to applaud. But in the midst of these fair conditions, there was one factor lacking to success. Till the date of Elizabeth's death the kings of England had governed her, Elizabeth most royally of all by virtue of her talents and her sex. England now must govern herself. What else was the possible meaning of Sidney's *Arcadia*, of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, of Bacon's *New Atlantis* and his philosophy of politics? Why else were Shakespeare's mind and art devoted to problems of personal character, and the influence of character on action? Did not all thought tend in this age to self-expression and self-assertion, to the realiza-

tion of responsibility, and the growth of a national consciousness ? Elizabeth's nominal successor was James VI of Scotland, to whom Robert Cary posted on the morrow of his mistress's death to greet him as King James I of England : her real successor was Parliamentary government. The right to be free—free from the Pope, free from foreign foes, free on the waters, free of knowledge, passion, and feeling—had been vindicated under the Tudors ; the power to use freedom was to be wrested from the Stuarts.

James I died in 1625, and twenty-four years later Charles I was beheaded at Whitehall. It was not with a light heart that his subjects sentenced him to execution, nor was it with a light heart or in a mood of caprice that, ten years after his execution, they abolished the Protectorate and restored his son, Charles II, to the Throne which he had left vacant. Imagine the subjects of Elizabeth usurping the Royal authority and playing catch-ball with her Crown ; how far had the conception of monarchy moved in less than half a century, between the 'Gloriana' epoch of idealized sovereignty and the stern realism of the axe ! ; and how striking a change was accomplished in that brief span between the temper of 'Cynthia's shepherds' and that of the Puritan 'Roundheads' ! It is the change from the old 'merrie England' of an irresponsible commonalty to the slowly-built England of democratic self-confidence.

The change is immanent in literature as well as in history. It is not enough to say that literature reflects its influence, or that the vocabulary of literature had acquired something of the philosophy which was moulding the life of the nation. Litera-

ture is a part of the change, is inseparable from it, helping to make it, and sharing the benefit of it. A new and a more responsible note—a more 'imperial' note, as it is the fashion now to term it—enters into literature about this date. John Milton (1608 to 1674), who was a boy when Shakespeare was still alive, looking back on Shakespeare in *Il Penseroso*, and half-envying, perhaps, the elder poet's detachment from politics, recalls him as 'fancy's child, warbling his native wood-notes wild'. The praise, or phrase, has been thought inadequate, but to the Puritan poet, immersed in the stern business of the Commonwealth, Shakespeare's freedom of the woods must have seemed like a dream of the Golden Age, and Queen Elizabeth like an Olympian. Milton's awfuller song could not follow its own wild will; duty had tamed the songsters, and the freedom to warble native woodnotes was no longer permitted to England's poets. Other singers in that age took the same serious view. Richard Lovelace (1618 to 1658) wrote *To Lucasta: Going to the Wars*:

Tell me not (sweet) I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.
True: a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.
Yet this inconstancy is such,
As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, dear, so much
Lov'd I not Honour more.

and *To Althea: From Prison*:

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an heritage.
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone that soar above
Enjoy such liberty,

thus taming the unchecked licence of the woods with the conceptions of honour responsible to conscience and of freedom faithful to the poles of duty. But Milton was the greatest in his age. Literature owes to Milton the finest example of a man who took the risk of mortality and postponed the expression of a genius which poured through his brain like a torrent till he had fought the battle of his country's liberation. He, most, loved 'honour more'. He might not have lived to write his *Paradise Lost*; strictly speaking, he did not live to *write* it; he was blind and growing old when he dictated it to unwilling daughters. But, though he had lost every sense in the service of national freedom; though—what were bitterer to Milton—he had forfeited his poet's immortality, he would yet have chosen to live his poetry before he wrote it; he would yet have been campaigner and pamphleteer, a firebrand in the camp of the Roundheads, before he was England's epic poet.

English literature since Milton has not been unworthy of his example. Wordsworth (1770 to 1850), though he loved to brood upon the 'wood-notes', was fired by a later revolution; Carlyle (1795 to 1881) was moralist and reformer as well as prophet and historian; Ruskin (1819 to 1900) cared for his country no less than for his art, and united art with conduct, and Tennyson (1809 to

1896) ennobled in his verse the freedom which his countrymen used. But we go back to Milton for the striking instance of the man who exemplified in his life the dependence of literature upon conduct. As the nation advances in the civil and moral qualities which are the landmarks on the road of civilization, so the horizon widens for the inspiration of her men of letters. It is not art which makes progress; art does not necessarily improve in a kind of arithmetical progression, keeping step with the centuries on the road to millennial perfection, so that Shakespeare in the sixteenth century is 'greater' than Chaucer in the thirteenth, and Tennyson in the nineteenth greater than either. This talk about relative greatness is meaningless and confusing. The statues in the Temple of Fame are not set against the wall and arranged in the order of their inches. The true record of progress lies in the resources added to the material of art. Shakespeare's superiority to Chaucer, and Tennyson's to Shakespeare—to keep to the names which have occurred to us—is merely in the accident of time, and in the wider prospect revealed to each poet in turn by the civilizing and humanizing forces of an additional two hundred and fifty years.

Let us narrow the issue to a few concrete facts. In 1350—the year when Boccaccio published the *Decameron*—Chaucer, in his 'Italian period', was maturing the *Canterbury Tales*. England's horizon at that date was bounded in the south by France and in the north by Scotland; she was fighting for breath on both her frontiers. Two and a half centuries elapse. In or about 1600, Elizabethan

England was at her zenith. The defeat of the Armada had extended her physical horizon; the New World lay before her; and Shakespeare, whose *Hamlet* appeared in 1602, and Bacon, with his *Advancement of Learning* in 1605, were widening the frontiers of self-knowledge and self-control*. Again there is an interval of two hundred and fifty years. In 1850 there appeared Alfred Tennyson's poem *In Memoriam*. In 1852 his *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* celebrated the praises of a man whose victory over England's enemies at the 'world-earthquake, Waterloo', was (with Nelson's Trafalgar) her greatest achievement in arms since the defeat of the Armada. In other words, the boundaries had been once more extended, and in 1851 Queen Victoria, with the Prince Consort at her side, was able to organize that huge exhibition at the Crystal Palace of the arts and engines of peace, in which not only her own subjects from the four Kingdoms took part but her colonists from across the seas, and her nation's former rivals on the Continent of Europe. 1350-1600-1850: we may round off the figures and generalize the facts. Three times in the span of five centuries, at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, English history has been crowned with the name of a national poet—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Tennyson. How much of what Shakespeare

* The advance was not made without victims. In this very year, 1600, Giordano Bruno, who is described (*Cambridge Modern History*, II, 707) as 'of all the thinkers of the Latin Renaissance the most modern; in him science becomes philosophical, and philosophy . . . enlarges its problems', was burned at the stake in Rome, after spending eight years in prison at the instance of the Inquisition.

wrote was inconceivable to Chaucer ?, how much of Tennyson's utterance unintelligible to Shakespeare ? This, in fine, is the problem of the progress of art—not what the later poet wrought better, for sublimity knows no degrees, but how successfully he employed the ampler material at his command, the gathered experience and conclusions of the intervening era of action and thought. Quite simply : could Shakespeare have written Tennyson's apostrophe to the rulers of England, inspired by his reflections on Wellington's death ? :

O Statesmen, guard us, guard the eye, the soul
Of Europe, keep our noble England whole,
And save the one true seed of freedom sown
Betwixt a people and their ancient throne,
The sober freedom out of which there springs
Our loyal passion for our temperate kings.

Again, could Shakespeare have written those earlier stanzas of Tennyson, composed in the patriotic mood which fired him from first to last ? :

It is the land that freemen till,
That sober-suited Freedom chose,
The land, where girt with friends or foes
A man may speak the thing he will ;

A land of settled government,
A land of just and old renown,
Where Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.

Or could the poet who was bred in the traditions of Raleigh, Drake, and Frobisher, have conceived in the spirit of Robert Browning (1812-1889) these *Home Thoughts, from the Sea* ? :

Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the north-west died
away ;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay ;

Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay ;
In the dimmest north-east distance dawned Gibraltar grand
and grey ;
' Here and here did England help me : how can I help
England ? '—say,
Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and
pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.

The idea of patriotism and sea-power contained and expressed in those poems of the nineteenth century was not immanent in Shakespeare's mind ; it had no place in his environment ; quite simply : its time was not yet. A later generation was to acquire it, and to win its sanction and consolation from a country torn by civil war. Our 'sober freedom' under 'temperate kings' was not a gift from the void, not a *bonus* attached to English citizenship and maturing in the due course of time. Undreamed of under the Tudors, it was wrung by an indignant people from the misgoverning Stuarts. As in the parable of Samson—the hero whom Milton admired*—the sweetness came from the strong ; the passionate love of country and the sense of national self-confidence were born from the lion's carcase, from the Tudor autocracy ruined by the misrule of the Stuarts. The period covered by John Milton's life, 1608 to 1674, contains the seeds of modern England. For the nation which beheaded King Charles, and which restored his son to the Throne after ten years' experiment of Republicanism, must have passed through a phase of transition and reconstruction. It must have been profoundly dissatisfied with the monarchical theory, when the passing of Elizabeth stripped

* *Samson Agonistes* (Samson, the Strong Man) is the title of a dramatic poem by Milton.

the romance of the trappings from the Tudor practice of monarchy, and left the theory bare. It must have been equally dissatisfied with the Protectorate experiment, since that violent remedy hardly survived the death of its strong and necessary author. And this double discontent was surely a splendid experience in the fifty-odd years which elapsed from Elizabeth's death in 1603 to the Restoration in 1660. When a nation's discontent assumes so strenuous a power in shaping the national destiny, it acquires the quality 'divine'. No nation could pass through this experience without changing its outlook on politics and morals, and on all that makes up its life. Literature will reflect the change, and, accordingly, we make a break in this attempt to read English Literature aright at the date of the Restoration. From Chaucer to Milton, England passed through the phases of a development which brought her to the beginnings of her present greatness. She established peace in her borders; she overthrew the might of Spain; she shook herself free from Papal domination; she took her place on the sea; and, finally, she succeeded in asserting her right to constitutional government. From a feudal and island people she passed through a period of strong monarchy to the position of a Parliamentary State in the van of the European Powers which governed the new-discovered world. This marks a period in her history. Her further development on democratic lines, and the organization and extension of the Empire, annexed by freebooters and pirates, will occupy us in the next volume, where we shall mark the stages in the

growth of the literature of democracy. In the present chapter we are concerned with the transition from Shakespeare to Milton, from the literature of an undisputed monarchy to the literature of the age which overthrew it, and built up free institutions on its ruins.

Remote from the centre of affairs, in his vicarage on the edge of Dartmoor, Robert Herrick (1591-1674), who died in the same year as Milton, might close his ears to all sounds except the melody of his own verse. He might water his daffodils with tears :

Faire Daffadills, we weep to see

You haste away so soone :

As yet the early-rising sun

Has not attain'd his Noone.

Stay, stay,

Until the hasting day

Has run

But to the Even-song ;

And, having pray'd together we

Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,

We have as short a Spring ;

As quick a growth to meet Decay,

As you, or any thing.

We die,

As your hours doe, and drie

Away,

Like to the Summers raine

Or as the pearles of Mornings dew

Ne'r to be found againe.

He might sing of cherry-blossoms, and lilies, and pansies, of violets, and carnations, and of 'gelli-flowers begotten' ; he might tune his lyre to Julia, or Perilla, or Perenna, or Silvia, or Electra, or Lucia, or, comprehensively, 'to his mistresses' ;

he might even write 'To Anthea, who may command him any thing':

Bid me to live, and I will live
 Thy Protestant to be:
 Or bid me love, and I will give
 A loving heart to thee.

A heart as soft, a heart as kind,
 A heart as sound and free,
 As in the whole world thou canst find,
 That heart Ile give to thee.

Bid that heart stay, and it will stay,
 To honour thy Decree:
 Or bid it languish quite away,
 And't shall doe so for thee.

Bid me to weep, and I will weep,
 While I have eyes to see:
 And having none, yet I will keep
 A heart to weep for thee.

Bid me despaire, and Ile despaire,
 Under that *Cypresse* tree:
 Or bid me die, and I will dare
 E'en Death, to die for thee.

Thou art my life, my love, my heart,
 The very eyes of me:
 And hast command of every part,
 To live and die for thee.

He might amuse his cultivated leisure with dull epigrams and luscious lyrics, contained in his collection called *Hesperides*; he might express in his divine poems, or *Noble Numbers*, the verse-recreations of a vicar, but for all his charm—and it is great—he missed the inspiration of his times. The movement swept by and stranded him; for fifteen years he was ousted from his living, being finally reinstated in 1662. But whether he came up to London and busied himself with printing his

books, or whether he found hospitality among his kinsmen and friends, he stood apart from the men who made history, and was probably unknown to Milton, and to the great Protector who had England's epic poet for private secretary.

There were other lyric and religious writers, whose verse forms, as it were, a lower and shallower arch of the bridge across the Restoration, in which the central span is the magnificent poetry of Milton. While the Elizabethan impetus declined through the fine dramas of Ben Jonson, satirizing the 'humours' of his age, to the crowd of meaner playwrights—Massinger, Ford, Chapman, Shirley, Marston, and the rest—on whom Shakespeare's mantle hung so loosely, the opposing impetus of Puritanism, aided by political events, and by the inevitable reaction consequent on the Stuart succession, made a rapid stride through the trivialities of poetasters to the imperious message of John Milton*. We need but note the attempts made—

* The Puritan spirit, it will be remembered, had opposed the rise of the drama from the pot-house and tavern surroundings in which so many of its Elizabethan votaries held a loose and dissolute court. Shakespeare raised the tone of stage-life, as well as the level of dramatic writing (see p. 119 above). Such a pamphlet as Gosson's *School of Abuse* and the apologies for poetry written partly in reply by Sir Philip Sidney, Puttenham and others between 1580 and 1590, presented the *pros* and *cons* of the Puritan and 'Pagan' tendencies just before Shakespeare came to London. (See *Documents Illustrating Elizabethan Literature*, Routledge, 2s. 6d.) Thus, Puritanism was dormant throughout the brief period of Shakespeare's pre-eminence, and its recrudescence at the time of the decline of the drama was not contrary to expectation. In Milton's hands it became constructive instead of merely critical; the opposition became the government, and England is constitutionally competent to appreciate the best fruits of both movements—*Hamlet* in 1602, *Paradise Lost* in 1667.

unsuccessfully indeed, but made nevertheless—between 1618 and 1640 to close the Blackfriars Theatre; the natural and concurrent deterioration in the character of its patrons and the standard of the plays, the prohibition of Sunday performances, leading in 1642, about the beginning of the Civil War, to the closing of the playhouses altogether, in order to follow the course of that wave of reaction. We need but mention, as above, the pretty fancies of Lovelace and Herrick, the greatest of the 'Cavalier' poets, who included Thomas Carew (1598–1639 ?) and Sir John Suckling (1609–1641), in order to see how slight was the thread which united secular poetry at that time with the conduct of life.

A little nearer the centre and more representative of their age were the so-called 'metaphysical' poets. The term is borrowed from Dryden by Dr. Johnson (1709–1784), whose essay on Cowley in his *Lives of the Poets* should be consulted at this point. He writes of the school as follows :

The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour; but, unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry they only wrote verses, and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables. . . . Their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural; they are not obvious, but neither are they just; and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perverseness of industry they were ever found. . . . From this account of their compositions it will be readily inferred that they were not successful in representing or moving the affections. . . . Their wish was only to say what they hoped had been never said before.

Robert Herrick's *Noble Numbers* have already

been remarked. From a sweeter fount of inspiration George Herbert (1593-1633), the Anglican 'saint', drew his 'sacred poems and private ejaculations', collected under the title of *The Temple*. At their best, they touch the highest standard of devotional poetry, which may be stated, in parenthesis, to be itself a confusion of two arts, for the truth which poetry pursues requires a medium of expression different from the language of religion. Real poetry is always religious, in the wider and non-technical sense; it imposes an obligation to conduct. But poetry is a layman's art; it should not reflect life through a theologian's mirror, nor think in theological moulds. The exquisite piety of much of George Herbert's verse disguises its imperfect medium, and the faults commonly ascribed to it are those of his school—a straining after novelty, a sense of effort and ingenuity, the feeling secondary to the expression, which alienates sympathy and repels the rapture of inspiration by frigid images and conceits. Of this quainter type, for the most part, are the *Divine Emblems* of Francis Quarles (1592-1644), and the moral and pastoral writings of George Wither (1588-1667). In the instance of Richard Crashaw (1613?-1649), the glow is more apparent than the defects. His poems have recently been republished*, and the *Steps to the Temple*, though by no means free from mysticism of thought and language, are marked by all the profound fervour and spiritual enthusiasm

* In Routledge's *Muses' Library*, with an introduction by Canon Beeching. Herrick, Carew, Suckling, Marvell, and Waller are included in the same series (1s. net each).

which he derived from the movements of his times. Lastly, we name Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), a younger contemporary of Milton's, whose piety, like his master's, was united with an active zeal; who was politician as well as Puritan, and was thus saved by his practical genius from the sins of the metaphysical school, to whatever heights of poetry their religious ecstasies may have lifted them. Marvell wrote but little, but that little includes some happy lyrics, as well as in later life some satires, and his friendship with Milton adds an interest to his career.

The other writers of this age must be postponed for the present. The new poetry of Edmund Waller, of Sir John Denham, Sir William D'Avenant and Abraham Cowley, belongs more properly to the age which is represented by Dryden and Pope. It introduces another strand into the web which naturally grows more complicated, as English literature increases. In order to learn how to read the writers who flourished at the Restoration we shall have to note their predecessors in the Caroline age. But Waller and Cowley are not necessary to the present preparation for Milton, nor need we refer at length to the theologians of the period, who included Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667), whose prose occupied us in the last chapter, Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), the author of *Urn Burial* and *Religio Medici*, and Thomas Fuller (1608-1661), who compiled, as we have seen, a *History of Cambridge* as well as *The Worthies of England and Wales*. These three great contemporaries, of whom Taylor is the most Elizabethan, while Browne and Fuller exhibit the frequent quaintness of style which, in

prose and poetry alike, was a kind of stepping-stone from exuberance to formalism, belong to the rich background of the picture of civil and religious struggle in which Charles and Cromwell were protagonists, and of which Milton is the voice. John Bunyan (1628-1688), author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the most captivating allegory of conduct ever written in any language, typifies in his aims and sufferings and in the romance of his life the early policy of the Restoration. Less fortunate than Milton, his dissent landed him in prison, and for more than twelve years Bunyan—a new John the Baptist—was confined in Bedford gaol. His writings are too well known to require description here, where his name need but be mentioned as a final illustration of the preoccupation of England with religious thought. The tinker's son in prison, John Milton in his secretary's chair, were alike governed by a passion for purifying faith and restoring God's kingdom on earth.

We have sketched very rapidly the chief features in the background from which Milton emerged as the representative in literature of seventeenth-century England. We have noted the force of the Puritan reaction, culminating in the close of the theatres in 1642. We have noted the flight of irresponsible songsters, the Lovelaces, Herricks, and Sucklings of the age, touched at moments to seriousness when the fiery shafts from the battle at the front pierced the egotism of their lyric mood. We have noted the rise of the religious poets, poised between sentiment and pietism, and reaching, as in Herbert and Crashaw, a high level of expression. We have noted—merely his-

torically—the signs of a new school of poetry in Waller and Cowley, the first representatives of eighteenth-century standards. We have noted the Elizabethan style flowing through Taylor's paragraphs of musical prose, and mixing in Browne and Fuller with the conceits of its decadence, while all these were similarly moved by the religious spirit of their time. Lastly, we have seen Andrew Marvell standing by Milton's side, and Bunyan in prison a few years later occupying his unique genius with the problem of the way of grace.

The preparation for Milton is complete, and we can see him at once lifting himself above his fellows, and disdaining the destiny to which he might seem born. For he too was a Cambridge man, like Herrick, Herbert, and Crashaw, and might have been content to tune an industrious lyre to his mistresses and mysticism alternately. He deliberately rejected this temptation; or, rather, he merely proposed it in order to emphasize its rejection. Born in 1608, in 1637 Milton published his elegiac *Lycidas*, written in memory of Edward King, a fellow-student and friend, who had been drowned in crossing the Irish Channel. In this poem he asks the question:

Alas! what boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely, slighted, shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
Were it not better done, as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?

If we recollect that Quarles's *Divine Emblems* had appeared in 1635; that George Herbert's *Temple* was published in 1633; that William Browne of

Tavistock (whose name we have hitherto omitted), was continuing the pastoral vein of Sidney and Spenser in his *Shepherd's Pipe* of 1614; that William Habington's love-poem, *Castara*, appeared in 1634; that Suckling and Lovelace were writing their light and erotic songs at the time of the composition of *Lycidas*, we shall better be competent to mark the meaning of Milton's reference to 'Amaryllis' and 'Nearcha.' Quarles and Herbert, it is true, were not 'sporting in the shade'; indeed, Herbert's beautiful life forbids even the suggestion of such a thought. But Milton, a few lines later, has something to say of the corrupt English clergy—Edward King had been destined for the church—and it is perhaps not fanciful to suppose that to Milton in 1637 the choir of versifying clergymen seemed likewise a little remiss in attention to their more active duties. St Peter in *Lycidas* apostrophizes King:

How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,
Enow of such as, for their bellies' sake,
Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold!
Of other care they little reckoning make
Than how to scramble at the shearer's feast,
And shove away the worthy bidden guest.
Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learnt aught else the least
That to the faithful herdman's art belongs!

In this striking epithet 'blind mouths', Milton goes straight back to the etymological meaning of 'bishop' and 'pastor'. The bishop (*episcopus*) is the overseer and the pastor is the feeder of his flock. The bishop who does not see, and the pastor who devours the food which he is appointed to distribute, are equally false to their trust. The

one is 'blind', and no bishop; the other a 'mouth', and no pastor*. And generally, these lines, with the others cited just before, express Milton's profound contempt for current standards of responsibility, at a time—in his thirtieth year—when he saw the poet's office filled by mellifluous singers, toying with their mistresses' hair, and the sees of the church usurped by unworthy men. Swift and sure comes the answer in this pastoral elegy; the answer, as we may almost term it, of one young Cambridge poet to another, of Milton to Herrick as it were; of duty to ease; of conduct to egotism:

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
 (That last infirmity of noble mind)
 To scorn delights and live laborious days;
 But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
 And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
 Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears,
 And slits the thin-spun life. 'But not the praise',
 Phoebus replied, and touched my trembling ears:
 'Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
 Nor in the glistening foil
 Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies,
 But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
 And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
 As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
 Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed'.

This, then, was Milton's attitude to life in his thirtieth year. At an age when, half a century before, in the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth, the leading spirits in literature were either in dalliance at the Court, or roystering at the Mermaid,

* By far the best commentary on these lines, and on the more difficult passage which follows them, is contained in Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, which should be consulted at this point by every student.

John Milton was consciously choosing the hard, strait path, with its meed laid up in heaven. I do not say that the stern figure of the Puritan poet is more engaging or admirable in its kind and degree than that of Shakespeare at thirty, busy with theatrical affairs and throwing himself with all his heart into the profession he had chosen. No comparison is possible, for there is no common standard. The point is, to observe the difference in the times and in the men, and to be grateful that England could produce such greatness at either time of need, and to learn to appreciate the inheritance.

Milton in *Lycidas* did not approach the problem of conduct for the first time. In *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, written a few years before, he had sketched in parallel poems the delights of mirth and of melancholy, and in *Comus* (1634) he had presented, in the form of a 'masque' produced at Ludlow Castle, the claims of chastity and temperance as the guiding principles of right living. The argument between *Comus* and the Lady—Bacchantic self-indulgence and virgin purity—may be quoted at length, recollecting that the writer of the masque was less than twenty-six years old:

List, Lady; be not coy, and be not cozened
With that same vaunted name, Virginity.
Beauty is Nature's coin; must not be hoarded,
But must be current; and the good thereof
Consists in mutual and partaken bliss,
Unsavory in the enjoyment of itself.
If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
It withers on the stalk with languished head.
Beauty is Nature's brag, and must be shown
In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities,

ic of the Year,
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Where most may wonder at the workmanship.
It is for homely features to keep home ;
They had their name thence : coarse complexions
And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply
The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool.
What need a vermeil-tinctured lip for that,
Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the morn ?
There was another meaning in these gifts ;
Think what, and be advised ; you are but young yet.

LADY. I had not thought to have unlocked my lips
In this unhallowed air, but that this juggler
Would think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes,
Obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb.
I hate when vice can bolt her arguments
And virtue has no tongue to check her pride.
Impostor ! do not charge most innocent Nature,
As if she would her children should be riotous
With her abundance. She, good cateress,
Means her provision only to the good,
That live according to her sober laws,
And holy dictate of spare Temperance.
If every just man that now pines with want
Had but a moderate and befitting share
Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury
Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
Nature's full blessings would be well dispensed
In unsuperfluous even proportion
And she no whit encumbered with her store ;
And then the Giver would be better thanked,
His praise due paid : for swinish gluttony
Ne'er looks to Heaven amidst his gorgeous feast,
But with besotted base ingratitude
Crams, and blasphemes his Feeder.

Comus, 737-779.

The citation is long, yet it does not include the best passages in this poem. In dwelling exclusively, however, on the *moral* of Milton's early poems, with all its historical significance, the reader is liable to overlook their formal excellence and interest as well as the profoundness of their scholarship. Let us take hold of these aspects

before we are rapt away by the sublimities of *Paradise Lost*.

And first, as to the formal excellence : *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, and *Lycidas* itself were all experiments in the pastoral style of poetry, and all belong to the period in Milton's life known as the Horton years (1632-1638), when he was living quietly with his father at the village of Horton, in Buckinghamshire. The pastoral vein, as we know, had been cultivated by the Elizabethans. Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and more recently Phineas Fletcher (1582-1650), the author of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, were all pastoral poets, and Milton owed to each of them a considerable poetic debt. He was indebted, too, to the prose *Anatomy of Melancholy*, a discursive and learned pot-pourri of reflection, observation and quotation—chiefly from recondite sources—published by Robert Burton (1577-1640) under the name of 'Democritus junior' in 1621. Pastoral poetry led him back to Theocritus, Moschus, and the Greeks, to Virgil, Ovid, and the Romans, and to the Italian writers who practised that style in later ages. From each and of all these Milton garnered the best, adding in *Comus*, particularly, reminiscences of Circe in the *Odyssey*. But the novelty in his poems, apart from their native music and depth of thought, was the relation which they bore to the actual facts which they dealt with. Pastoral elegies were common enough, and their conventional setting had been used with good effect, for instance, in the poetic memorials to Sidney. Milton, in *Lycidas*, though he retained much of the familiar symbolism and stagecraft,

applied the stock imagery of that style to the scenery and circumstances of Edward King's life and death. Pastoral odes, again, had their regular characteristics, but in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* Milton employed as ornaments the ample resources of his own wide reading, and the familiar marks of his own times. And in *Comus* he succeeded, most originally, perhaps, of all, in using the pastoral framework as the vehicle for great moral truths, and thus in raising that form of verse to a height which it had never reached before. He vitalized pastoral poetry, lavishing upon the wonted forms all the wealth of his knowledge and imagination, and breathing into them the fire of his enlightened purposes.

Next, as to the learning : A few quotations will suffice to typify the stores of scholarship from which this young poet could draw. In *Comus* we find, among hundreds of allusive phrases, such as 'budge doctors of the Stoic fur', a stanza so full of classical lore as the following invocation :

Listen, and appear to us,
In name of great Oceanus.
By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace,
And Tethys' grave majestic pace ;
By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,
And the Carpathian wizard's hook,
By scaly Triton's winding shell,
And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell ;
By Leucothea's lovely hands,
And her son that rules the strands ;
By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet,
And the songs of Sirens sweet ;
By dead Parthenope's dear tomb,
And fair Ligea's golden comb,
Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks
Sleeking her soft alluring locks.

In *Lycidas*, we meet 'old Damoetas', 'sage-Hippotades', 'sleek Panope', Camus, and 'that two-handed engine at the door', an image which no one has quite satisfactorily explained. We are confronted, too, with passages like the following, where every line and every word are filled with allusions and reminiscences, so deftly re-combined as almost to conceal beneath the music of the verses the learning which went to their composition :

Ay me! whilst thee the shores and sounding seas
Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurled ;
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world ;
Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
Where the great Vision of the guarded mount
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold.
Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth :
And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth.

Similarly, the twin odes to Folly and Melancholy are filled with the fruits of Milton's learning, and it may truly be said that no English poet has borrowed so much from his predecessors, or has paid such interest on the loan, or has constructed for his sole use so rare and rich a vocabulary.

Such, then, was Milton in 1638 at thirty years of age ; and if he had died in that year, and had added nothing to his fame, he would yet have been remarkable as a Puritan poet of ample promise, who had re-invented, as it were, the pastoral style in English poetry, and had expressed through that medium aspirations and aims of the highest value both to conduct and to art.

In a sense, the poet did die in that year. From

1637 when *Lycidas* appeared, till 1667, the year of *Paradise Lost*, the poet was merged in the Parliamentarian, the politician, and pamphleteer, whose sole poetic contribution during the thirty central years of his life was a handful of sonnets, mainly on topics of the day. This is the fact in Milton's life which cannot be too much emphasized, that with every incentive to lead a scholar's life, and urged by his father to take orders in the church, he should yet have devoted his middle thirty years to active political campaigning, spending his manhood, spending his middle-age, spending his eyesight in that service, and returning—blind, soured, spent, weary—in his lonely age to the tasks of high poetry which had occupied him in youth. For the dream of *Paradise Lost* was with him throughout these years, or, rather, he cherished all that while the ambition of writing immortal verse. He took it with him on his travels when he left his father's house at Horton in 1638 to visit the cities of Italy (as Chaucer had visited them before him); and shortly after that date he declared with the self-trust of genius that it was his 'portion in this life' to 'leave something so written to after-times as they should not willingly let it die'. The idea at first took shape, probably in his Cambridge days, as an allegorical drama or mystery-play, with Gabriel, Eve, Conscience, Lucifer, Mercy, among the persons. Then he seems to have abandoned this design in favour of an English epic poem, dealing with the national hero, King Arthur and his Round Table. This was the subject, as we know, though overlaid with allegory and ornament, of Spenser's *Faerie Queen*; and

later it became the subject of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. But when, as Dr. Johnson writes, in his *Lives of the English Poets*, Milton 'after much deliberation, long choosing, and beginning late' at last fixed on a subject for his masterwork, he returned to his youthful idea, recast in the form of an epic:

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat.

Paradise Lost, I, 1-5.

How did he occupy the intervening years, those years from thirty to sixty which most men use for the furtherance of their own ambition and for the cultivation of such gifts as they can turn to good account? Why are only a few sonnets interposed between the *Lycidas* of 1637 and the *Paradise Lost* of 1667 in the life-work of this poet?

In order to answer these questions satisfactorily, another question must be asked. How was England employed during those years?, and what demands did she make on the love and loyalty of a son trained as Milton had been in the Puritan school, and resolute as he was to 'scorn delights and live laborious days'? Let us read some of the titles of his prose-writings in that period:

'Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England, and the Causes that have hitherto hindered it'.

'Of Prelatical Episcopacy'.

'The Reason of Church Government [urged against Prelatry]'.

- 'Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnuus'.
- 'Apology against a Pamphlet called A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions', etc.

All these before 1642.

- 'Tract on Education'.
- 'Areopagitica, or Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing'.
- 'The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce Restored, to the Good of both Sexes'.
- 'The Judgment of Martin Bucer concerning Divorce'.
- 'Tetrachordon, or Expositions upon the four chief places in Scripture which treat of Marriage'.
- 'Colasterion: a Reply to a Nameless Answer against the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce'.

All these before 1645.

- 'Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, proving that it is lawful, and hath been held so through all ages, for any who have the power, to call to account a Tyrant, or Wicked King, and, after due conviction, to depose, and put him to death, if the ordinary Magistrate have neglected to do it'.

February, 1649: a pamphlet with a terrible title. Milton was growing terrible in those days. His first wife—a Royalist, poor woman!—had left him in 1643; the long Parliament had met in November, 1640; the Civil War, which Milton watched in London, broke out in 1642, with Naseby in 1645, and the entry of the Parliamentary army into London in 1647. Within two months of King Charles's execution, Milton was appointed Secretary for Foreign Tongues (Latin Secretary) to the Council of State, and removed to the palace of Old Whitehall. His secretarial duties were important; he was literally the pen of the Commonwealth. To him it fell to reply to the so-called 'King's

Book', the prayers and meditations of the late king 'in his Solitudes and Sufferings', known as *Eikon Basilike*. Milton's *Eikonoclastes* (or idol-breaker) was published in 1649. A reply was likewise demanded to the Dutch professor, Salmasius, who had written in defence of King Charles, and Milton, in 1651, produced his first *Defence for the English People*. He was thanked by the Council, and the book enjoyed wide esteem. A *Second Defence* followed in 1654, and contains a magnificent eulogy of Cromwell, and other leaders of the Commonwealth.

So we come through the storm and the calm to the year of Restoration, 1660, when, despite the fickle impatience of the populace for the recall of the exiled Stuart, John Milton—stern, immutable, unsilenced—would not abate his cry for a perpetual republic. The personal retort which fell upon him was a pamphlet cruelly entitled *No Blind Guides!*; the public and crushing rejoinder was the entry of Charles II into London at the end of May in that year.

Why Milton was not executed when the Stuarts came to their own again is a problem which has never been fully solved, though it is clear that his case was very cleverly managed by the pilots of the Parliamentary bills, between two of which he seems to have slipped through, and by certain influential friends, among whom were Andrew Marvell and Sir William Davenant*. He was in danger for a while, but at the close of 1660 he was

* See on this subject *Poetical Works of John Milton*, edited, etc., by David Masson (3 vols., Macmillan, 1882), I, xlix.

free. Disappointed of his public hopes, embittered in his private life*, totally blind since 1652, poor, unloved, neglected, Milton at last was free to return to the pursuits which he had laid aside in 1638. His enemies—the exulting Royalists—had, as Professor Raleigh writes, ‘crippled only his left-hand in silencing the politician, but his right hand, which had hung useless by his side for so many years while he served the State, was his own still, and wielded a more Olympian weapon. In prose and politics he was a baffled man, but in poetry and vision he found his triumph’†.

Accordingly, in 1667, at his house in Artillery Walk, in the year after the ‘Great Fire’, Milton published his *Paradise Lost*; in 1671, his *Paradise Regained* and his drama of *Samson Agonistes*, and in 1674—a little quieter, a little more satisfied, a little less unloved—the great man died.

This book teaches ‘how to read’; it is not an epitome of literature. Shakespeare, Milton, are authors of whom it is necessary to know the conditions and environment of their writing in order properly to apprehend its nature and its knowledge-value. The rest must be sought at first-hand. We can see the blind poet now, in his lonely middle-age, sitting, in summer, ‘in a grey coarse cloth coat at the door of his house near Bunhill Fields,

* His first wife, Mary Powell, the runaway, returned in 1645, and died in 1653, leaving three daughters; in 1656 he married Catherine Woodcock, who died in childbirth fifteen months afterwards. Milton referred to her in a sonnet as his ‘late espoused saint’. In 1663 he married Elizabeth Minshull (who survived him) mainly in order to be relieved from the unwilling services of his daughters.

† *Milton*. By Walter Raleigh (Arnold, 1900); p. 36.

without Moorgate', or, in colder weather, 'up one pair of stairs, which was hung with a rusty green, sitting in an elbow-chair, black clothes, and neat enough, pale but not cadaverous'. He dictated his verses, thirty or forty at a time, and, were he free from the pain of gout, we are told 'his blindness would be tolerable'*. Yet in his 'grey coarse cloth' or in 'black clothes, neat enough' he was the poet of his own description, 'soaring in the high region of his fancies, with his garland and singing robes about him'†. We need not go behind these pictures, we who know the promise of Milton's youth, fulfilled through a stern and strenuous manhood lived in the forefront of the fight for the liberties of England. Rather let us go before it, to seek the flowers which sprang from the soil watered by his tears, Milton's tears—a strong man's, disarmed. Before he was thirty he had written *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, *Lycidas*. During his manhood he worked for the realization of those ideals of conduct which his verse upheld, writing a few grand sonnets, and composing political pamphlets of an eloquence surely untouched in that region before or since. We may quote the famous passage from *Areopagitica*:

Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with

* From the notes of the painter, Jonathan Richardson (1734); Masson, *op. cit.*

† Milton, *Reason of Church Government*, ii, Introd.

those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms.

In his sixty-third year, with these magnificent endowments, these stupendous energies and powers, he invited the muse again :

The meaning, not the name, I call ; for thou
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
Of old Olympus dwell'st ; but, heavenly-born,
Before the hills appeared or fountain flowed,
Thou with Eternal Wisdom didst converse,
Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
In presence of the Almighty Father, pleased
With thy celestial song. Up led by thee,
Into the Heaven of Heavens I have presumed,
An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,
Thy tempering. With like safety guided down,
Return me to my native element ; . . .
Standing on Earth, not rapt above the pole,
More safe I sing with mortal voice unchanged
To hoarse or mute, though fallen on evil days,
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,
In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,
And solitude ; yet not alone, while thou
Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when Morn
Purples the East. Still govern thou my song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few.
But drive far off the barbarous dissonance
Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race
Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard
In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears
To rapture, till the savage clamour drowned
Both harp and voice ; nor could the Muse defend
Her son. So fail not thou who thee implores ;
For thou art heavenly, she an empty dream.

Paradise Lost, VII, 5-16, 23-39.

We recall the lines in *Lycidas* :

What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
The Muse herself, for her enchanting son,
Whom universal nature did lament,

When, by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His gory visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore?

We recall the intervening years, with all their splendid achievement, all their terrible experience; we note the 'darkness', the 'dangers', the 'solitude', of England's epic poet in 'evil days'; we listen to his bitter cry against the 'barbarous dissonance' with which the merry, mocking Stuart filled the London of the Restoration, and we are sure that Milton, like Satan, the veritable hero of his epos, will turn his conquest to victory:

What though the field be lost?

All is not lost—the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield,
And what is else not to be overcome.

Paradise Lost, I, 105-109.

But he, though blind of sight,
Despised, and thought extinguished quite,
With inward eyes illuminated,
His fiery virtue roused
From under ashes into sudden flame,
And as an evening dragon came,

... as an eagle

His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.
So Virtue, given for lost,
Depressed and overthrown, as seemed, ...
Revives, reflowerishes, then vigorous most
When most unactive deemed;
And though her body die, her fame survives,
A secular bird, ages of lives.

Samson Agonistes, 1687-1707.

Here, surely, if ever, we see the poet *living* his poetry—see Milton, who wrote in youth the noble verses about 'fame' in *Lycidas*, proving by experience in age

Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished
A life heroic, on his enemies
Fully revenged. . . .
Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the break; no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise or blame; nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

Ib. 1709-1724.

The reader of *Paradise Lost* will discover its sublimities for himself, its matchless music of blank verse, its lofty and majestic style, its large, emotional diction. No preliminary study can do more than to serve as an approach to the apprehension of the poet whose 'influence on the destinies and history of our literature might be compared to the achievement of Napoleon' *; who is one of those 'few characters which have stood the closest scrutiny and the severest tests, which have been tried in the furnace and have proved true, which have been weighed in the balance and have not been found wanting, which have been declared sterling by the general consent of mankind, and which are visibly stamped with the image and the superscription of the Most High' †; and whose epos was declared by Dryden (1631-1700), a few years after Milton's death, to be 'undoubtedly one of the greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems which either this age or nation has produced'.

We shall come to Dryden and his school in the first chapter of the second volume. Here, at the

* Walter Raleigh, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

† Lord Macaulay, *Essay on Milton*.

death of Milton in 1674, we may fitly make a pause. For in the three hundred years which have elapsed since Chaucer's pilgrimage to Canterbury, English literature has advanced to remarkable heights. We saw England in the fourteenth century at a distance from the circle of civilization, seeking her manufacturers in Flanders and her poetry in Italy. We saw her in the fifteenth century working her way to the front by warfare on both her borders, and by social struggles at home. Throughout the sixteenth century (roughly, in the Tudor period from 1485 to 1603), she drew closer and closer to the centre of affairs, rejecting the Papal dominion, overthrowing the lead of Spain, taking her place in the New World, adding the ocean to history, and intensely interested in human character and capacity, interpreted by Bacon in philosophy and by Shakespeare in drama. She maintained in that century the equipoise between Parliament and King, between national self-consciousness and autocratic power, by the tact, strength and personality of her rulers, whose line culminated in a queen recommended to popularity alike by her talents and her sex. In the seventeenth century we have seen this artificial balance disturbed. The violent remedy of civil war was summoned to arbitrate between a weak and pleasure-loving monarch and his self-reliant Puritan people. A Protectorate was established by the dominating force of Cromwell, assisted by the eloquence of Milton, till the people, satisfied with their victory and repenting its fruits, restored the transformed monarchy.

The English character had realized itself in

these three hundred years. England had found self-expression. Through Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, she expressed the phases of her growth. Henceforth, we come to a new period. A century of criticism supervenes on the centuries of construction. Between the Restoration and the French Revolution, which disturbed society afresh and altered the standards of taste, England turned in upon herself—enjoying, criticizing, carping, but no longer unconsciously working towards the fulfilment of an end. The Englishman had worked out his release from the hampering bonds of the Middle Ages. The final problem of all art, the place of man in nature, the relation of the *I* to the *not-I*, was temporarily settled: he was free of knowledge by Bacon's emancipation, free of conduct by Shakespeare's, free of will by Milton's. What further barriers were to be broken?; what further capacities to be employed?; what further victories gained in succeeding generations?

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